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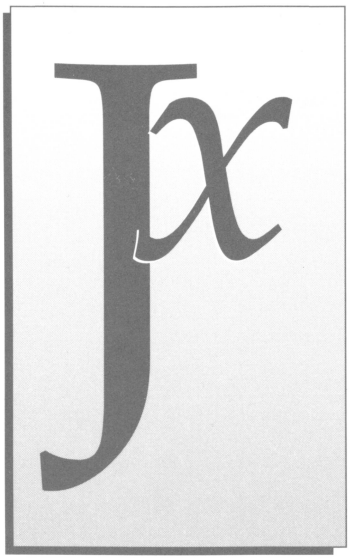

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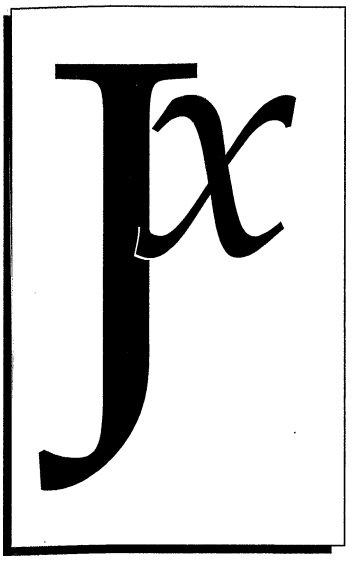

Volume 4 • Number 1 • Autumn 1999

CONTENTS

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in memory of

Michael Sprinker

1950-1999

"India Ink": Interstices of Autobiography and Popular Images

Rane Arroyo

Rane Arroyo is an Associate Professor in English and creative writing at the University of Toledo. His latest book of poems is Pale Ramón *(Zoland Books, 1998). This essay is part of a project in process called "The Portable Famine: Autobiography and Popular Culture."*

1.

For a long time I've been intrigued by India and filled with a desire to visit it, a desire that I found strange due to the intensity of its nature. As a gay Puertorriqueño, I could never quite rationalize my longings for the Indian people and their culture. They weren't normally mine except as available through mainstream (and sometimes pleasant) capitalistic films such as *A Passage to India* or *Gandhi*. India, as an idea and/or a setting, became a text of the fantastic. Was I trying to avoid interrogating my own complex identity by transferring energy into a cultural community without personal risks to myself? I've witnessed the often disturbing cultural transvestism of other scholars who have called themselves anglophiles, etc., and yet I didn't feel so much as if I wanted to possess India; rather, I was like an exile anxious to return to his or her *home,* or at least to the idea of it.

Instead of turning away from this site of anxiety, I thought my interests in India might prove revelatory about my work as a scholar and writer, a means by which my own development as an intellectual might be made visible. I did not dismiss the possibility that perhaps I was remembering a past life spent praying on the banks of the ancient and still holy Ganges, although I know that the river is not merely mythic. My version of India was a puzzle with too many initial pieces. In this essay, I recreate the processes that led me toward a peculiar and particular insight into my own strategies as a mediator between facts and fictions, a mediator in words no less mysterious

because they stand revealed. Each section works within its own borders. As a totality, these narratives reclaim pieces of my past in which I struggled to survive. India was often a concept that gave me refuge.

2.

I grew up with images of India everywhere about me: the Beatles smuggled sitars into the rather provincial world of rock and roll music; writers such as Allen Ginsberg sought out gurus and lost their 1950s beat fashion sense; the Nehru jacket was popular among my uncles and neighborhood boys I thought as cool as James Dean or Sal Mineo — and much closer at hand; reincarnation was discussed in suburban living rooms as if it were a redecoration idea; *National Geographic* specials kept showing dead people floating down the Ganges while stressing that this was a different phenomenon than the bodies of American and Vietnamese soldiers floating down televised rivers; and Jonny Quest and his adopted brother, Hadji,[1] an Indian orphan who is at first mistaken for an assassin, continued to enjoy their homosocial relationship on the television airwaves riding the breath and width of this country. In the 1990s, however, India has become the proverbial invisible elephant.

I recently taught the *Bhavagad Gita* in a course called "Apocalypse: Myths and Possibilities." I was struck by my students' struggles to talk about this important book in intellectual terms, for to them there was nothing very real beyond the boundaries of Western Europe, the United States, or MTV. They refused to take seriously the existential dilemmas inherent in the *Gita*: which choice do I make in order to make meaning with cosmic ramifications? How is the self related to the greater whole? Is duty more important than one's blood ties? One student said the book reminded her of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, only more boring, without a climax. Instead of dismissing her comments, I encouraged the student to map out her narrative expectations. This led to a class discussion about the Bible and its rather nervous multi-climactic stories. This student was shocked even to imagine the book of Revelation as anything but revelation. When another student said Revelation reminded her of *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now*, the class went into an uproar. It is allowable to dismiss other people's holy book as a film, but not the Judeo-Christian text of social norms as illustrated by parables that define and disarm social deviations. The more I tried to suggest that India might have been (and still is) a "real" place, the more my students referred to themselves as American readers.

The class made interesting claims that as students in the Midwest's rust belt they had no incentive to consider the *Gita* as even marginal to their lives; at the same time they refused to consider the Bible as a text produced in a culture, or cultures, which might label them as intruders, appropriators, barbarians. If India was not in *our* image(s), it could — only as a text — provide an example of philosophy at odds with our own definitions of naturalized praxis. India was safely removed from our own apocalyptic expectations, and so its cosmic narratives of human destiny were "boring" because we had many more fears closer to home. One self-described "religious" student said that Jesus was more

"oriental" than he was European. The class didn't have the language at this point in the course to pursue this interesting argument further. A chasm opened before them in which their assumptions about "truth" were vulnerable to examination. People of Color often know about simultaneous or contradictory truths all too well in daily dealings with dominant culture.

We live, at the very least, in dual visions/versions of the world in which we spend our power. Centrality isn't a useful paradigm; homogeneity isn't the most friendly of concepts to the "other." There are real consequences in understanding that our ideas are just as constructed as those of people perceived to be different from us. Our discussion on the *Bhavagad Gita* took by us a circuitous route back towards our own country. Étienne Balibar argues that "theoretical racism represents the ideal unity of transformation and fixity, or repetition and destiny" (291), a statement that suggests there is real power in questioning "naturalized" world views about oneself and others. Xenophobia depends on metanarratives to veil the disorder at the heart of the true darkness of constructed lives.

3.

Kharman, my best friend in high school, had a variety of dramatic identity crises which led her into marriages, religions, lesbianism, secretarial work; she ended up living with my companion and me in Boston. At this time she was a punk, leather lesbian. Such a choice forced her to work usually for doughnut shops or as a "temporary" office worker. The United States is not interested in assisting anyone who chooses, out of free will, to become a permanent rebel, one no longer supported financially and/or emotionally by parents. As long as there are names to blame then homogeneity isn't very threatened.

One inspired day in Boston, Kharman wore a sari to work. She soon received a phone call from her temporary agency that her boss of that day had called to say she was very *uncomfortable* with Kharman's choice of office wear. Why was a white woman wearing this outfit? (Multiculturalism is often seen as a betrayal of the white race and culture.) Kharman was dismissed ("I was fucking fired"), and we took her out to lunch to celebrate the loveliness of this woman in her sari. Little did we know, sitting in that Boston restaurant, laughing at the corporate world, that we were witnessing the birth of the cruel Reagan era.

4.

In his essay, "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt," Homi Bhabha begins with an anecdote about Roland Barthes in a gay bar in Tangiers. This rhetorical strategy gives me permission, in my turn, to share a story about Bhabha himself. I was presenting a paper on the difficulties of creating a Hispanic narrator in some of my multigenre projects at the 1994 MLA conference in San Diego. My friends talked me into attending the Bhabha session despite

their disturbing energy, which seemed more appropriate for a rock concert than for a thoughtful commentary on issues of the contemporary text and the non-theoretical world. I often avoid readings and talks by all authors, always preferring the written word; I like the luxury of rereading, of thinking slowly through arguments, of private dialogue with an author. But there I was in a public space, flanked by hordes of mostly graduate students — I was one just a year earlier — who seemed especially electrified by the presence of Bhabha, the celebrity.

I know this sounds dramatic but I will not censor myself: I felt afraid for the intellectual work we need to do in the United States. Aren't we grappling with real issues that affect our daily lives? What is truly available to assist us with our own struggles in the intellectual spectacles I witnessed in conference after conference, spectacles in which scholars could claim a disturbingly specific genealogy simply by listening to a panel discussion ("I saw Bhabha and he said that . . . " and so on)? Of special interest to me was that the audience was a dazzling mix of People of Color and "whites," men and women, and other less physically distinct groups: gays, working-class scholars, writers, and the like. I hope I don't represent myself as some kind of puritan in saying there was a giddiness in the air, jokes about New Critics flying around. One friend said that Bhabha was "a stud." It was unusual to see dear colleagues suddenly enjoy life; it was a brief and limited joy, one without profound slipovers into their daily lives.

Earlier, in my own session, I heard an audience member dismiss a bright Indian scholar, who spoke before I did, with a terrible and terrifying comment: "He just wants to be the new Homi Bhabha." I looked at the brilliant and young scholar and wondered if he knew there was space for only one brilliant man from the East. Was it such a terrible thing to have elders you respect prepare the way for your own work, even if your ideologies aren't identical? It's as if the Scholar of Color is being forced into *one* acceptable Western mythic role: the Oedipus cycle. Much is gained by dominant discourse shapers if the rest of us are indeed ready to kill our elders for our own personal victorious positioning as the "new" minority major scholar, as if there can only be one or two voices from each convenient "other" group. This is ridiculous and actually quite evil. Many of us are not invested in destroying the work of the very people who have opened up theoretical possibilities for us, or whose work parallels, complicates, or rejects our own.

After Bhabha's talk, one of the first persons to ask a question was this very same young Indian scholar. I lost the thread of the question because I was shocked by what I was witnessing: many audience members' eyes burned with the fervent hope that blood would be spilled by either one of these brown men. I wanted to stand up and shout: *this is not a sport!* Of course I just sat there helplessly in my chair. The moment passed without incident and soon the session ended. Many people surged forward to thank Bhabha for his useful talk; I watched the young scholar being congratulated by his fellow (white) graduate students for daring to challenge Bhabha in public. It was not an intellectual challenge but one located in essentialism: will the new brown son kill the brown father?

I'm not restricting Bhabha to the role of either victim or naive sideshow freak; such a brilliant and original scholar must be very much aware of the business that surrounds being a public intellectual. This awareness of his audiences' multiple and contradictory expectations is evidenced in the question-and-answer session that follows the printed version of "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt." A man from the audience begins his "question" in this most disturbing manner: "I confess that I found your paper of forbidding difficulty, as I think many people did" (67). Bhabha politely listens to the long question and begins his own response with these words: "I can't apologize for the fact that you found my paper completely impenetrable. I did it consciously, I had a problem, I worked it out." This response, while firm, is actually polite, for Bhabha goes on to emphasize that his essay "is a work that is an aporetic, contingent position, in between a plurality of practices that are different and yet must occupy the same space of adjudication and application." This is a stinging claim that the intellectual, as either writer or reader, cannot (or indeed, must not) offer the process of thinking as a monolithic path. The Scholar of Color does not fit neatly into prescribed roles, even those offered by those within her or his particular field.

Bhabha's printed response is useful in questioning narrative as rationality, especially as deployed in historic Western European texts; they're not the only game in town. There also exist multiplicity, contradiction, rivalry, agreement, simultaneity. India is no longer over there and the United States is no longer here, although under certain circumstances each country can be geographically and culturally apart. Globalism means provocative intercourse between nations that are often genealogically linked to colonialism and imperialism.

James Baldwin often writes of the ideological displacements of the "white" man by Persons of Color(s) as the latter consciously reposition themselves; he works within the very American tradition of self-questioning and cultural unpacking, only he expects the word actually to affect daily life. David Leeming, the Baldwin biographer, offers the following example of this writer's talent at turning the specific into the cosmic:

> [A teacher] asked Baldwin what he had intended in [*Another Country*]. . . . The very shapelessness of [the novel], he said, was a reflection of the "incoherence" of life in America. Its characters are on desperate searches for the self-knowledge and self-esteem — the identity — without which real love is impossible. (200)

These desperate searches threaten dominant structures of power because questioning, in itself, is an act that respects no agreed-upon or established realities. In Baldwin's stories, plays, and essays, movement in space or through society by any Person of Color means inevitable change for the (monolithically) white male.

I didn't encounter how naturalized the "white" viewpoint is in our educational system until I began to teach about white culture as if it weren't a homogenous phenomenon but rather a site of conflicting images, information, and agendas. Indeed, many colleagues commented that one of my graduate

course offerings, "Thoreau and Postcolonialism," was too *exotic* for graduate students from a steel town. They justified their comments by saying our students hadn't yet grasped even the concept of an American literature; these were protests by professors whose offices were lined with books by Bhabha, Spivak, and Said. Interestingly, graduate students thanked me for offering them a window instead of a mirror! Exhausted by being forced to examine their lives without the global contexts that inform life outside of the classroom, these working-class students found of great use Bhabha's examination of "mimetic narratives and . . . monumental history" (66); they too, in different ways from me, had been excluded from reigning metahistories. The United States, as examined in the course, became less united. Xenophobia — traceable to the experiential, the "essential" self and to capitalism's gobbling up of difference — returned us to an intellectual space in which to understand the dangers and opportunities in crossing borders of any kind. We had been taught to laugh at elders who once believed that they could fall off the planet itself. Now we are afraid we can't, that we are each other's ultimate reality, that we can't plunge into eternity.

5.

I found the following poem[2] in one of my notebooks as I began editing this essay. I am reminded of how much of my work I keep at home far from a reader's eyes. What catches my attention is my need to write about India, again. I find that the poems I don't publish, those that I keep locked inside my handwriting, tend to be curious about the world around me. My poetry books seem to focus on "Latino" and "Gay" issues that, of course, are rooted in my identity struggles. In this poem, "The Station Master Speaks," I write of observations culled from a PBS special on train rides throughout the world:

> A filling moon in a full India, men jump
> on the train engines, crowds late for funerals,
> the whistle's sound is a fingerprint,
> the miles have been identified and named:
> now, cars bear the burden of men's breaths,
> it is a portable scar, past Bombay with
> its 13 million two-footed commuters,
> privilege is having more than 30 seconds
> to decide where to sit (if you can sit),
> the noise of our arrivals and departures
> through Milk Villages, past the largest slum
> in Asia, movement makes us all rich[.]

Though I make no great claims for this poem, it does reveal a recognition that the world is larger than my viewpoint, that even this filmed India helps temper any narcissistic ideological impulses I may sometimes value as a poet.

6.

While my friend José was smashing plantains (*platanos*) in his Queens kitchen, the rest of us sat in the living room trying to pretend we couldn't hear the astonishingly violent noises coming from the kitchen. Was José really a Buddhist? Why? When? Why have so many Puertorriqueño friends with Ph.D.s converted to a religion and philosophy whose Indian roots are at such a distance from the Caribbean? Soon the meal was cooked and we all sat for the late supper, an enjoyable reunion. I have sat at so many other meals with Latinos, who almost always automatically cross themselves before eating — including many of the Buddhists. Jesus and Buddha are not rivals, or that is my hope. I smiled at my friends and ate the Spanish rice and beans, the pollo guisado and tostones; they tasted especially delicious as do most meals which fellow exiles share.

7.

My original dissertation topic focused on Henry David Thoreau's constant quoting of Hindi texts and culture in that most "American" of books, *Walden*. I remain curious about the notion of quotation, the human need behind introducing someone else's voice in scholarship that is usually nothing more than a monologue disguised as a dialogue; the English field, in general, seems to honor the skilled ventriloquists. I remember sitting in the office of a nationally famous professor, one of the few Americanists in my doctoral program, and feeling increasingly nervous at the man's obvious excitement about my proposal. Within a few moments, he elected himself my dissertation chair and wondered aloud who else would fit in this "most original" project. I quickly thanked him and as I backed out of the office he declared that I was "a young Sacvan Bercovitch." I wasn't even a good, middle-aged Rane Ramón Arroyo, clearly a priority. Later that week I changed dissertation topics without informing this professor (who has never talked to me since except for civil comments required in the day-to-day interactions in graduate school). Instead, I became a modernist focusing on the Chicago Renaissance, freed to pursue my own ideas with the assistance of the kindest committee.

I share this story because I do often regret I did not pursue the Thoreau book, for I am still fascinated by the necessity of inventing (an) India in order to justify or make the American Renaissance profound to America, to England, to Western Europe. I do not regret my narrow escape from the intellectual interference of a kind scholar whose enthusiasm frightened me; I also do not regret the loss of the potential national exposure through the complex networking available to the favored few mentored by the famous. What a curious business academia is, for while it rewards rereading of canonical texts, the "white" texts never are truly displaced or replaced. "Original" scholarship rarely "intrudes" with demands upon dominant texts.

India, for Thoreau, is a stream that feeds Walden Pond: "The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges" (322). In making India

only sacred, and restrictively so, the land and people become merely philosophical concepts divorced from the actuality of Indian lives, with their individual and collective passions. Thoreau proves to be as much an eloquent capitalist as those he denounces in his writing; the buying and selling of Hindi philosophy without worrying about contexts of cultural meaning and distribution is based on the model provided by spice and silk traders. Even when Thoreau seemingly calls for multiculturalism, or plurality at least, there is a profound catch: "That age will be rich indeed when . . . the Vatican shall be filled with Vedas and Zendavestas and Bibles, with Homers and Dantes and Shakespeares. . . . By such a pile [of texts] we may hope to scale heaven at last." Hindi writing is limited to the spiritual; Western culture's poets exist in the real world. India is effectively erased as a present and ongoing phenomenon, and it gets co-opted by the Vatican, which is once again the simple and "rightful" center of human consciousness. I cannot help but recall Gandhi's words, "Almost every page of the *Gita* advises us not to make a distinction between our own people and others. How is this to be done?" (70). He posits the struggle not in the writers but in the readers.

8.

Ben Kingsley as Gandhi? And he wins an Oscar? I'm not convinced that Western Europe and the United States are in the postcolonial world quite yet, or if they are, that Western culture has given up its concept of the master as a necessary role. I agree with Satya P. Mohanty that there are many risks that may indeed create mechanisms that will repeat "the colonizer's judgments" (111). Since the so-called First World and Third World are no longer easily kept apart, embracing through the magnetism of international business and media, there is a strange hybridity in process in a film such as *Wild West* (1992), which features Indian youths who puzzle their own community, already displaced within England, by forming a country and western band and mapping cultural spaces not even imagined by other Indians. Not surprisingly, the Indian "cowboys" (another example of multiplicity) end up in America seeking a record contract — Nashville as the Temple of the Golden Buddha with Steel Guitar. The American Dream has become an infectious dream, one that crosses borders with impunity. It is a series of imperialistic structures whose purpose is the maintenance of exploitation. *Wild West*, despite its gestures toward agency, ends up as yet another example of American co-optation. The exported country music returns to America with Indian youths in tow, youths desperate to speak popular culture as if it were their "mother" tongue.

American popular culture is not always attractive to People of Color. This obvious fact has to be stated outright. In order for me to make any claims on the series *Jonny Quest* or on *West Side Story*, I must perform a series of complex readings. In rejecting offered ideologies on race, class, and gender, I have learned to ignore or "detonate" troubling texts. I suspect it has been my hunger for an image somewhat like me that has led me to find whatever mirror is available. Increasingly I feel like an "historical" Puerto Rican as my students in

Ohio surf the net into cyberpueblos. They are creating new configurations I once thought to be science fiction. They have been empowered and are empowering themselves to create images and texts that speak to them and of them. By contrast, growing up poor in the 1960s and 1970s, I was forced to become an alchemist.

I especially question myself when as a poet and playwright I refer to India. In the very opening scene of my play, *Bed But No Breakfast*, Georgia — an African-American actress seeking refuge from her urban life at a country inn — is surprised to see that she is alone in the mansion. A note directs her to sleep but not to cook in the house for the fear of starting a fire that might burn the place down. She says:

> There are only two things that you expect out a of bed and breakfast place in New England. A bed. A breakfast. The first night and every night. Simple, no? The second morning and every morning. Not too complex? Well, I got a bed. Bed, but no breakfast because the owner of this Colonial house has gone to India to search for British antiques from around the Revolutionary War. White tourist in a place belonging to brown people. But I'm black. Just like every other shadow in this bed but no breakfast place. Have you ever noticed how some white people live in such a nice and safe world, à la Disney World? I wish my world would revolve into one big evolution! One big turn of the wheel of fortune and BANG — no more revulsion, ah, I mean, retribution, ah, I mean, revolution. Oh, I almost said revolver. The name of a Beatles album, and the lifestyle of many a brother.

India is used in this monologue as a repository for British culture that is ironically to be reified in New England (with the stress on *new*).

Yet I've also participated in romanticizing India for my own meditative purposes, not necessarily a pardonable theft. In the poem "Breathing Lessons," I look at the phenomenon of the Puerto Rican Buddhists I mentioned earlier. There is something unsettling for me about a philosophy based on the release of desire when most of us Latinos in the United States are already so poor, so empty-handed, except for our culture and our cultural productions. Desire proves to be an important epistemological system. I write:

> Buddha teaches that most beaches
> in Puerto Rico are illusions,
> that the naked and the dead are
>
> not obscene but opaque. He longs
> for *home*. Longing is thinking so
> he takes bigger breaths. In, in, in.

In simplifying Buddhism for my own rhetorical agenda I am opened to the charge of pilfering. I *intend* to open up dialogue and not close it the way *Gandhi* or the PBS series *Jewel in the Crown* transform "hindoos" into vehicles of

racism that maintain the status quo. Buddha, in this poem, and India, in my play, are offered as intentionally contested sites of ownership and ideology.

While preparing one of the "final" drafts of this essay, I have learned that "Breathing Lessons" has won a Pushcart Prize. There is reward indeed for pilfering other cultures — or perhaps hybridity is being recognized.

9.

There was the actor Sabu who in the film *The Jungle Book* was like Hadji of *Jonny Quest* fame, only he was nearly naked and less witty. Sabu was one of the rare exciting brown actors on the Hollywood screens of my youth. I did not want to imagine myself as someone's gardener, maid, or chauffeur, or as the fat Mexican who was doomed to be killed by the white sheriff. Today I remember little about this film; interestingly my mother owns a copy and has lent it to me, but I have found innumerable excuses not to watch it again. What do I fear? I don't expect the film to survive as some kind of masterpiece. The film contains ghosts that have little to do with the story.

No, it's Sabu's face and body that survive in my mind, even if disembodied within my scholarship and creative writing. He, in that film, possessed an innocence that actually required Sabu, as actor and character (another example of simultaneity), to investigate British colonization for the unnatural creature that it was. Sabu, living in the Indian jungle with *wild* animals, seemed so much more natural than when he was forced into proper Western clothing. Even as a young audience member, I knew that the West would win its ideological war. Hadn't I seen the same phenomenon in my own neighborhood, even in my own family? Hadn't we stopped speaking Spanish in order to "get ahead" in Chicago? Didn't we learn to wince at the cousin who would inevitably show up at a family party in bright (garish?) clothes and in jewelry as big as a baby's fist?

The Jungle Book's India existed as a propagandistic backdrop to the dramatization of British cultural superiority, which of course engendered American cultural superiority; it was reduced to a cast of exotic savages, toothy animals, and ungrateful servants. There is nothing innocent about the valorization of whiteness in a story or film that is intended for "whites"; Audiences of Color have become master intercultural interpreters out of necessity. Sabu was handsome, in harmony with nature, and sensitive (so much so that he dies spiritually with his invaded India). These are of course insights that neither writer nor director *intended*, and they only exist because reading isn't an easily controlled act. I make no claims of authenticity for Sabu's represented otherness, for his body and mind are controlled by the business of representation. Hollywood assures the masses that racism and homophobia (etc.) are not specific individual trespasses unless the dire acts of a few extremists, that ideas mysteriously remain abstract and unsystematized by majority culture. Sabu's presence allowed me, as a young viewer, to claim a space for myself. Some ideas allow potentiality to be more real than actuality. I remember going home, astonished that maybe most of the world wasn't always white; despite Sabu's ultimate bow-

ing to British culture, the actor and the role had freed me to imagine a different version of the film being presented to me as a completed text.

In re-viewing the *Jungle Book* film for this essay — again and at last — I'm struck by the fact that I only remember the beginning and the end of the film in great detail. Somehow the "savage" boy supersedes the tamed one, although his appearance is brief and melodramatic. The jungle of this movie isn't as dangerous as the village life. At film's end, a cobra guards the treasures hidden in a ruin, reassuring the viewer that greed is a terrible human sin. Yet isn't the Indian boy's soul stolen in this story? The lessons are explicit as the once wild child returns to the village, saves it through heroic action, and reestablishes the patriarchal structure through his heterosexual allegiance to Mother and to future wife — but not to the jungle.

10.

In "Passage to India," Walt Whitman has an ecstatic vision of "[t]he road between Europe and Asia" (344), which gives him an opportunity to address Columbus: "(Ah Genoese thy dream! Thy dream! / Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave, / The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream.)" (344). This passage reminds me of the childhood confusion I had in differentiating American Indians from Indians. I was raised to respect Columbus' obsessive dream of reaching the shores of India, China, and Japan; indeed his discovery of the Caribbean islands — including Puerto Rico — became a point of origin for me and my family. It has taken time for me to stop being protective about Columbus and those such as Whitman who declared their imperialistic desires for "more than India" (349). Will I ever wake up from living inside this Genoese's nightmare? Or have writers and other "historians" preempted my voice long before I was even born so that my protestations can be safely dismissed as political correctness? Can I be so easily dismissed, despite the years of pain and some secret joys?

11.

My mother adds a casual footnote to our conversation: "By the way, another of your friends, Samantha, has finally divorced that Indian man. She has stopped wearing saris and no longer cooks curried rice. I'm not sure if she is happy or not. She lives in Ohio, not too far away from you." I don't know how to react or what to say aloud. Is my own mother being racist? It's hard to imagine this because she has suffered so much through the Americanization of her family. Can a Puerto Rican feel superior to an Indian? If so, why? What is achieved? I felt an unexpected Foucauldian moment unfold before me: we, the People of Color, volunteering to ensure that racial divisions, as taught by dominant culture, remain intact through our willing surveillance of the "other." We are thereby denying that we ourselves are someone's "other."

My mother clarifies her words: "Samantha was too much like a tourist in that marriage." These words don't dismiss the entire conversation, but they do

dramatize that my mother, like many others, is attempting to understand how multiculturalism really works. Abandoned by my father, and now forced to face a post-Kennedy America on her own, my mother has returned to her culture. In her most recent visit, she was concerned if Youngstown, Ohio, was a place for Latinos ("Are there Spanish stores there?"), and if religious ceremonies there would take place only in English ("Where is the nearest Catholic church that has mass in Spanish?").

The notion of "tourist" to her implies an unwillingness to commit, to live the commitment: our friend married her Indian neighbor as much out of curiosity as out of love. This rather cruel judgment on our part was in fact supported by the curiously racist comments that Samantha made now and then. She seemed liberated to say terrible things about "dark races" since she was married to "one of them" and so was suddenly an expert in intercultural exchanges. But she is also a woman capable of great love and affection, a talent not often praised. Mother changes the topic and tells me of her childhood in the Puerto Rico lost to her for years. I understand she is giving me information, but it is veiled because our entire conversation has been spoken in English. It keeps us at a safe distance from a homesickness that isn't just emotional but also intellectual.

12.

The last of Gandhi's ashes were quietly released into the Ganges in 1990. According to a National Public Radio report, the ceremony was not only intimate but practically ignored by the world. There were the faithful who were bathing at the banks of the holy river, but they were there for their own enlightenment. *How odd*, I thought, *pieces of Gandhi*: the last of his ashes culled from his shoulder bone, ribs, skull, or perhaps the left ankle. All gone, all returned to the nothingness that is at ground zero in each of our genealogies.

I sat on my windowseat and caught my breath. It was ridiculous to feel such sorrow overcome me. Gandhi had been dead for a long time. *The last of Gandhi.* All that remains now are his deeds and his advice in writing I had used in my own classrooms. His ashes had never been a particular concern. But they made Gandhi's death final in Youngstown, Ohio, which of course was absurd, but absurd enough to bring tears to the eyes of a stranger without any legal right to mourn. The ashes became of the river, even as the river ignored such a profound contribution.

13.

Jonny Quest was one of the few spaces on the television of my youth that a brown face occupied as a major player, an equal partner (more or less), a secret role model for the minority viewer. Hadji was Jonny Quest's pseudo-brother, personal magician, fellow conspirator, caretaker, rival, interpreter, and mystery. I was a young, imaginative, independent (I still continue to claim that my only

talent is that I'm stubborn), and lonely Puerto Rican boy who was naturally attracted to Hadji and his world: an artist among scientists. The cartoon youth, after all, traveled all over his world as an *adopted* member of the Quest household, holding higher ranking than the beloved family pet, Bandit. I was engaged in my own assimilation into American society, a project begun simply because my parents decided that I should be born in Chicago in order to be a *real* American instead of merely becoming one through assimilation. Even as a child, I sought the means to retain my own Puerto Rican identity at the same time as I felt the pressure to establish an intimate relationship with someone like the blonde future frat boy Jonny Quest, whose inevitable destiny was to be the center of the known and the unknown universe.

It was especially appealing to me that the Quest household was basically masculine, and I had always assumed (needed to assume?) that Hadji and Johnny were lovers, or would become lovers in the future.[3] I knew little about Buddhism then, but these young adventurers seemed like soulmates, bound to each other through many past and future lives. Certainly a nervous masculinity was a question central to the original series, for in the *Jonny Quest* movie I recently saw on television, and in the new cartoons based on the original, heterosexuality has been emphasized as female companions have come forward in the plot. A recent poll in which Race Banyon was voted best cartoon mother, however, still reveals a certain anxiety over gender roles. No wonder that I was so attracted to this series; it featured my own unarticulated issues about being a boy who preferred a male society.

I had no such models in my own immediate world. *Jonny Quest*, the cartoon, offered me that rare creature: a brown boy peering back from the television's mirror. I'm convinced that Freud got it wrong by referring to homosexuals, in the term of his day, as "inverts." I was actually looking out at the world for signs that I wasn't alone; my interior "self" seemed to be a fixed phenomenon while the outside world seemed fluid and ever in need of definition. Thus, Hadji encouraged me to go into a world never traveled by any adults in my life, or so I believed then. Scholar John Beverly writes, "El socialismo no he podido competir efectivamente con el capitalismo en la producción de una cultura de masas" [Socialism has not been able to compete effectively with capitalism in the production of mass culture] (59). Mass media has actually afforded me the space, quite unintentionally, to rewrite the world in my own image, at least some of the time and especially during the vital years of my adolescence.

Viewing *Jonny Quest* today I wince at the series' stereotypes of Hadji, which intentionally reify the Hindu as a mystic, Third World magician among scientists. Yet I cannot deny the pleasure I found those times when Hadji's turban would turn into a cobra while he played a flute! Somehow I dismissed all the stereotypes and was enraptured that a brown person had such power or powers. I was similarly attracted to the *Hardy Boys* (the book series), for example, but no character clearly marked as *other* was featured in any of the mysteries. No, it was Jonny Quest and Hadji who filled me with longing for a land of countless Hadjis. How often I've dreamt of walking down Calcutta streets, among the fabled crowds and dust, and exhaling at last: what it must feel like to be home.

In revisiting the cartoon series, I remember being interested in the episodes in which the two young men traveled, as if motion itself was of value. The internet guide to the adventures has an incredibly organized listing of places or sites that Jonny and Hadji visited: the Sargasso Sea, the Arctic Ocean, Egypt, Mexico, Thailand, the Amazon, Europe, Tibet, unnamed islands in the Pacific and the Atlantic. They were empowered to define these places by their own presence: the privilege of scientists and poets. This was a lesson not lost on me. Today, though, when I see an episode such as "Riddle of the Gold," I am troubled by the absence of history and cultural materiality. Hadji returns to an India that has been reduced to an evil maharaja and a revengeful leopard. An ahistorical Hadji has succeeded in the Americanization of his soul. His India is no longer his home, only a site of adventure and nothing else.

14.

Hadji is a troubling figure for me. In some ways, I identified with him, and in other ways, he remained (and remains) uneroticized. I wasn't attracted to him precisely because he was too much of a mirror and it seemed that the world outside of me was the real mystery. I must ask myself in postcolonial fashion whether or not I have been taught not to see him as a sexual agent capable of independence from the discourses of whiteness by which he is defined as other.

David Bergman's wise study, *Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature*, states that "[t]he vampire and the homosexual possess a narcissism without a reflection. They fall into the abyss, not to embrace themselves, but in a vain search to grab hold of any image" (45). This notion of "grabbing" hints at the hunger there is for identification, a visual (and cultural) confirmation of one's own aspects. Narcissism is a loaded word, one in which regulation is thinly disguised. Self-interest is too often seen as asocial and somehow disruptive. Transgression then can be located in images of versions of oneself that turn out to offer alternative or resistant reflections.

Research comes with its disturbing moments, as in this account of Hadji as a major figure in the *Jonny Quest* series:

> Jonny's pal Hadji was created in response to Barbera's desire to add a dog to the show, which Wildley resisted. When Bandit was added, they realized that now they had a show where the hero would be basically talking to his dog. So they added Hadji, another character near to Jonny's age. Based on the Indian actor Sabu, Hadji's character was one of mystery and magic, a counterpoint to Jonny's more Western persona. ("Jonny Quest Origins")

This is an astonishing revelation to me. First of all the Sabu I admired is here replicated. Jonny was clearly the intended center of focus, a naturalized one, even as Hadji and the dog Bandit were added to supplement Western civilization (as if the compass has neutrality). What is the opposite of mystery and magic? Scientific process and production? How did this dichotomy between left brain and right brain, science and poetry, east and west, become so codified?

It turns out that I was misreading my beloved cartoon series. Bergman makes the important observation that "no homosexual is raised as such; he finds no likeness in the family circle. . . . Indeed the family reminds the homosexual of his own 'unlikeness'" (30). I had projected an intramale relationship into a seemingly postcolonial pretend family of pretend figures. Hadji could not be my sexual hero or model because he was just as bewildered as I was about being a counterpoint to discourses not necessarily his own. Hadji and Jonny were boys, then, but I was investing in the future of their sexuality, even as I was beginning my own adventures in puberty.

In the past, I have gone home with Latino men because I didn't want to be accused (or to accuse myself) of rejecting my own brothers. That naive response, of seeing a lover in terms of political identity rather than multiple, simultaneous identities and investments, was an honest attempt to own something of my own past. Two brown bodies in one bed would surely become each other's embassies. I share this because anxieties over identity have larger repercussions than have often been voiced in many autobiographies. As Alberto Sandoval Sánchez writes, "Where / I expect a mirror / there is a hole" ("A Chorus Line" 46).

15.

Queer theorists have done much to look at the "naturalization" of sexual identity as a complicated and multi-headed monster. While this essay introduces same-sex desire as the logical end of my illogical fetishizing of the idea of India rather than India itself, it is equally true that I have mapped the poverty of images by which I've turned "straw into gold," as I write in the poem, "My Transvestite Uncle Is Missing." Higher culture is often better guarded and "airbrushed" in order to maintain its homogeneity, to keep out the materiality of difference. Popular culture is often where "leakage" can occur, where someone like me, a Person of Color who is also gay, can find an intentional or unintentional reflecting pool (Narcissus as role model) and experience the salutary shock of not being alone or a unique creature — much like Caliban's awakening to his entanglement with the others who turn him into an other.

But there are newer fictional and nonfictional texts now that have addressed the image of India as interconnected with Western Europe's great metanarrative of itself. I've included only those texts that have had a direct bearing on my own intellectual development, although I've since "discovered" texts such as J. R. Ackerley's *Hindoo Holiday*, along with travel diaries by many others. Screenwriter and prose writer Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, for example, whose filmic England is nostalgic and fuzzy in interesting ways, offers a short story ironically called "Development and Progress," in which we can hear a certain psychic conquering of the conquerors as a British diplomat states:

> I fell in love with the country. There is need for me to go into detail. Others have done so, describing the overwhelming sensual and emotional effect India has had on them; and in some cases, how this was enhanced by their feeling for a particular person, or persons. (69)

By keeping the body as an erotic subject that is "naturally" located far from genealogies of cause and effect, sensuality becomes one means by which not to diagnose the intrinsic links between the idea of India and the actual India that I have yet to experience. By intellectualizing my own visceral "attachments," I have come to realize that, like many others before me, I was seeking a land in which I could participate with body *and* mind, that there was something in my own homeland that was preventing me from integrating my various identities. I just have to think of the rather tortured D. H. Lawrence exiled in New Mexico to understand that my own loneliness may perhaps be a systematic means by which the Other (a complex marginalized "creature") is denied a healthy reflective image in what the poet Richard Katrovas calls "The Public Mirror."[4]

I have since found other images closer to my own culture(s), from the CyberVato to the hermano in a James Dean costume. There are contradictions and points of anxiety even in these images, however. The macho Pachuco figure, for instance, has served as the occasion for a narration that "speaks its location as more than local yet makes no claim for universality for its viewpoint or language" (Sanchez-Tranquilino 564) — a statement I would complicate with Mikhail Bakhtin's insight that "one's own language is never a single language" (66). As I have moved through time and space on the internet, looked to my own past readings of novels and image-producers, and found links between my own personal sexual desire and the public mirrors that regulate my body and tongue, I have reread my experiences with Hadji and Jonny Quest as moments of personal freedom. I have rewritten the texts given me, an act of resistance that has allowed me to exist with body *and* mind. This has been done without permission, when no one was looking. I used to look at the maps at the local bookstores, maps that I couldn't afford. Those maps promised me that the world was real and that I was real and that someday we would coincide.

16.

Something protective in me stirs when I read Italian poet and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini's book about his travels to India. He observes, "You would need to have the repetitive power of a medieval psalmist in order to confront the terrible monotony of India in all of its representations" (90). Perhaps this is a fair comment made by a poetic mind about an actual India and not the virtual India I've created through media and chance experiences, but I find *The Scent of India* a disturbing book by a genius. Pasolini's Marxist politics vanish in it, and India becomes something beyond "salvation."

There is no doubt that postcolonial India is an amazing phenomenon, and I say this as a Westerner only now confronting his own misreadings of the stereotypes by which he was instructed to map the world. Allen Ginsberg writes in his *Indian Journals: M arch 1962-May 1963* of his own cognitive difficulties in a land overcrowded with stimuli. I quote at length from a single entry to demonstrate the almost feverish writing "required" by Ginsberg even at the end of his sojourn:

> May 136 AM the yellow sun outside balcony thru[5] trees Dasaswamedh ghat waking up with Richshaw bells — I been in bed several days with kidney troubles — Hay Ram Ram Hay — sings the Motley-clad-in-yellow-and orange Medieval Clown-looking Bhakta. . . . That I've seen him often each day for months — once offered him some change, thinking him a beggar, which he refused. (206)

A wise man and a fool seem to wear identical looks for this poet and others. Ginsberg knows this and even asks himself in June 1962, "And when will I ever turn my attention (here) to the streets and figures of daily India?" (29). It proves a rhetorical question, of course, because Ginsberg does not seek the "daily" but the "universal" or the exceptional. One's habits of attention are profoundly defined by one's culture.

Neither Pasolini's nor Ginsberg's "daily" India is what I was seeking in my own longing for India. I had found great comfort and intellectual prompting in a cartoon figure: Hadji Quest (he was adopted, but he was called only by one name). Seeing a brown youth in exciting circumstances inspired me to look — or create — opportunities for myself. I longed for India because I hadn't known how to make all the pieces of my life fit together into a narrative. It is true that India isn't my home, that Puerto Rico isn't my home, that the United States is and isn't my home. I realize that figuring out the puzzle of India's centrality in my thoughts has confirmed how complex most things are, even concepts such as "essentialism" and "miseducation."

I no longer feel the imperative to visit India as I once did. Perhaps comprehending the sources of my mystification of this country and its people has freed me of that affective "baggage." I was surprised how colleagues nodded and understood the genealogy I've traced in this essay.[6] Many of them have also created their own parallel false places: New York City, Hollywood, France, London, Tokyo. The India of my childhood is put away as I look at the world as an adult man, although I still find great wonder in terms such as "India ink."

India, then, as a subcontinent outside and beyond my individual sorrows, made me take quite seriously the task of writing words. I knew from early childhood that I was going to be a writer, that the Hadji figure had challenged me to see the world. Words written in India ink had to be taken seriously, for they had arrived to my hand and eye from a great distance, one that challenged my imagination. It turns out that India isn't the mystery but that I am, even now.

Notes

1. The story is examined later; "Calcutta Adventure" introduces the interstice of Hadji and Jonny. Hadji interests me in that he "learned English and judo from an American Marine, and wants to go to America" ("*Jonny Quest* Episodes Guide"). His India is traded for the new lamp of US culture and fraternity, an experience similar to my own.

2. I received the sensible advice to "gently" inform my readers that I quote my own work not as self-advertisement but rather as a deliberate strategy of

self-examination. The poets I admire have always been aware of the forces that have shaped their lives. Indeed, naming these forces is often what many of us consider our "real work." This naming, then, requires us to examine our own texts as we do the writings and images of others.

3. Of course this is just one "reading." Searching the internet on the subject of "Jonny Quest," I was amused to discover that a porn star has taken up that name.

4. This is the name of one of his powerful books of poems but also a term I've found useful in thinking of public discourses and their regulatory natures.

5. The spelling throughout this quotation is Ginsberg's own.

6. An internet search led to a brief biography of the Native American scientist, Wilfred Denetclaw. The overview states that, "[a]s a young boy, his favorite television show was a children's science-fiction program called 'Jonny Quest.' . . . He says that he knows only about ten other people from Indian reservations who he knows have gone on to earn Ph.D.s in science" ("Wilfred Denetclaw").

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Economic Conflict and Collusion in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*

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When *The Merchant of Venice* premiered on the London stage between 1597 and 1598, Shakespeare's choice of the dramatic background was certain to lend credibility to the plot. Venice was "in the news": the arrival in London of a Venetian ambassador in 1596, the loss of a Venetian argosy in the English Channel, and the detainment of another at Portsmouth in 1597 were current events (Forse 158). Moreover, Elizabethan audiences would have immediately associated the city with wealth and power. As John Gross aptly states, "The business of Venice was business" (58). While other republics in sixteenth-century Italy exploded with violent social conflict, converted to despotic states, or fell under foreign rule, Venice focused all of its efforts on mastering the wealth of Christendom to preserve stability. In foreign affairs, Venetian diplomacy averted costly wars with its neighbors. At home, the constitution was protected by an intricate web of checks, balances, and political maneuvering designed to recognize no interest higher than that of the commercial empire (Trevor-Roper 108-10). Early modern Europe regarded the Venetian system of impersonal capitalism as "the most perfect model of government for any mercantile state which aspired to be free, effective, and independent" (121). Venice had achieved fame and notoriety, and its relevance was not lost on Shakespeare. After all, England was the new merchant of the north. John Wheeler, a contemporary of Shakespeare and member of the Merchant Adventurers, England's most powerful mercantile charter, painted a vivid picture of his nation bustling with

commercial activity in *A Treatise of Commerce*: "all the world choppeth and chaungeth, runneth and raveth after Martes, Markettes and Marchandising, so that all things come into Commerce, and passe into Trafficque . . . in all times, and in all places" (quoted in Hotchkiss 130).

Competitive markets make for a dynamic economy, but they also spawn public anxiety. While English commerce took on a life of its own, the nation suffered growing pains similar to those suffered by the Italian states earlier. Emerging cartels, monopolies, and syndicates asserted their influence, challenging the power of the monarchy. Privilege, once an aristocratic birthright, became a commodity as enterprising commoners gained access to wealth and real estate. In Parliament, representatives whose voting rights were dependent on property rather than noble birth already "filled the benches of the House of Commons" (Stone 11). Change was in the air and England's burgeoning markets gave rise to a new social class that threatened to disturb the old feudal order. The repercussions of commercial expansion provide a compelling context for *The Merchant of Venice*, which examines the nature of justice. The drama's microcosm reflects the dynamics of a society testing the waters of a surging market economy but finally swimming against the tides of social change. As Shakespeare probes the ideological contradictions inherent in early modern capitalist practices, he taps into the public fears of Renaissance England, revealing acute political awareness.

Until 1600, one of the earliest texts addressing the subject of business as listed in the Stationers' Register of London is *The Merchant of Venice*, but two books are listed in the following year: Malynes' *Canker of England's Commonwealth*, a treatise on foreign exchange, and Wheeler's *Treatise of Commerce* (Hotchkiss 101). Wheeler, who rose from humble mariner apprentice to wealthy gentleman, sheds light not only on the political climate of his time but also on Shakespeare's ambiguous portrayal of Antonio, the merchant of Venice. Wheeler reports a rising tide of public hostility against merchants in 1597, when Parliament requested royal support against a predatory monopoly system. As trade increased, so did the merchant's role of importance. Operating under the basic tenet of medieval economics that "demand was inelastic and therefore the road to profits was through rigid control and limitation of supply," trading companies wielded considerable power: they dictated exorbitant prices for consumer imports, exploited the native industry by monopolizing raw materials, and paid minimal prices to domestic manufacturers (28, 47). This translated into gain for the merchant class but into loss for the urban masses, who helplessly watched their living standards erode (Ball 190). Ian W. Archer describes the conditions in England's metropolis during the 1590s as "the worst decade sixteenth-century Londoners experienced" (11). A taxing war, several plague and flu epidemics, failed harvests, rising unemployment, poverty and crime, and massive immigration contributed to civic unrest that culminated in riots and libels (2-7). The 1595 declaration of martial law, the hanging of rioters, and the city's appointment of marshals and attendants to restore order indicated the extent of civic tension and the nervousness of the elite (8). Compounding these dearth conditions, a rapidly growing population and the influx of gold and silver from New World mines into western Europe contributed to high

inflation in an economy of scarcity (Sacks 46). Trade wars with foreign mercantile companies had plunged England into economic depression before, so when threatened with another mandate in 1597, the queen took radical measures (Wheeler 40). Heavily indebted to the merchants of the Hanseatic League, which controlled the Baltic and North Sea region, she exiled the foreign trade company from its London stronghold and terminated its privileges. Next, she exacted sizable loans from her own merchants — in addition to already steep custom levies (41-4). But the queen's solution ignored larger issues. The Holy Roman Empire swiftly retaliated and expelled English merchants from its territories. Moreover, the "enemy" was already within.

Since English trade policies were patterned after those of the Hanseatic League and trading privileges were extorted by bribery or force, the monopoly system continued (Hotchkiss 22). England's commercial monopolies, however, were not nearly as invidious as the private ones created by the queen to reward her favorites. Extensions of monarchical power, noblemen often served as royal officials by collecting revenues — and kickbacks: "practically every article that came into the household had paid tribute on the way to Essex, Raleigh, or some other nobleman" (52). Simon Adams describes a patronage system heavily dependent on the profits of trade and serving as "a demonstration of political power" (43, 45). Rather than create the conditions for an expanding mass consumer market, the system favored those in already privileged positions (Ball 16). According to John Guy, the 1597 monopoly debates spawned "some of the ugliest Parliamentary scenes" and signaled "unequivocal resentment of the economic privileges and abuses promoted by courtiers and privy councilors solely for their private gain" (8). The queen promised an investigation, but by 1598, she had granted more new monopolies than she had rescinded old ones; worse yet, lucrative offices were openly traded for hard cash on the "black market" at court. Lawrence Stone notes that a few aristocratic and professional men carved themselves disproportionate pieces of the economic pie, "lording it in arrogant ease and luxury over an obsequious, cowed, undernourished, and illiterate mass upon whose labors they depended" (6). In 1601, the queen was forced to respond to public outrage. She imprisoned a large number of merchants, including one John Wheeler and Essex, who was once her "petted darling" but now fomented rebellion, and "lost not only her favor but his head" (Hotchkiss 54). Hotchkiss dryly comments, "If proof were needed of the fickleness of the queen or of the fact that her support of [the merchants] was based on temporary expediency rather than national policy, she certainly furnished that proof amply" (58). As a gesture of good will, John Wheeler, Secretary to the Society of Merchant Adventurers, hastily drew up the *Treatise of Commerce*, acknowledging a broad range of critics. In his document, he implores discontented fellow members to remain in the organization and obey its rules, pleads with Parliament not to consider the Merchant Adventurers' Company a harmful monopoly, reminds the queen that "failure to support the Company would endanger the Crown revenue and embarrass the kingdom financially," and appeals to the public to respect merchants in general and the royal Merchant Adventurers in particular (65). Though exceedingly diplomatic throughout the *Treatise*, Wheeler touches the delicate matter of reciprocity: just as trade

depended on royal privilege, so the queen absolutely depended on her merchants to finance the royal treasury (65). In his early correspondence with the monarch, Sir Walter Gresham, royal merchant and financial agent to the Crown, had urged, "keep up your credit, and especially with your own merchants, for it is they must stand by you at all events in your necessity" — a precept the queen heeded throughout her reign (quoted in Hotchkiss 41).

Not surprisingly, Wheeler's *Treatise* proposes conservative policies rather than reform. But it also suggests a pragmatic author who sincerely believed that "innovation" and "free trade" were terms of reproach (Hotchkiss 72). If Wheeler's views strike us as economically unsound today, they reveal enduring attitudes toward business in his time. Even his patriotism reflects the era. Since the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the exile of the Hanseatic League, England ruled the northern seas and jealously guarded its new power. A heightened sense of national identity and increased anti-foreign sentiments explain Wheeler's open animosity towards foreign merchants. Yet he never maligns his Jewish competitors. He mentions Portuguese merchants (the Portingale) who traded in spices and drugs but seems to express concern over their treatment by the Spanish (337). If Wheeler had referred to Marranos, Jewish merchants who had been expelled from the Iberian peninsula only to meet with the same fate in England, it could have provided a valuable new perspective from within the merchant community. Perhaps most notable is Wheeler's conception of the scope of commerce. He debunks conventional notions of what is marketable ("not only that which Nature bringeth forth"), and advises people to employ "the quickness and industry of their spirits" as well as "the labor and travail of their hands . . . so they may draw from thence either commodity or pleasure, or at leastwise thereby supply, help, and furnish their several wants, and necessities" (quoted in Hotchkiss 316). Finally, he proposes that "all that a man worketh with his hands and discourseth in his spirit is nothing else but merchandise" (quoted in 317). The idea of large-scale invisible markets, Lars Engle reminds us, was more disconcerting than reassuring to early modern Britons: "prior to Adam Smith, the market had little of its contemporary ideological valence as a normalizer or harmonizer of needs and capacities" (2). While guilds, magistrates, and the church had regulated a marketplace where goods were "presented, not represented," an ever widening commodity exchange defied traditional definition and control (Agnew 30). Driving on pure ambition and obeying only the rules of profit, emerging markets proliferated at an alarming rate. Jean-Christophe Agnew further emphasizes that the term "commodity" in the late sixteenth century "still signified, above all, a profit or advantage" (78). Predating Wheeler's commercial worldview by several years, Shakespeare's *Merchant* reflects a realistic early modern market economy and a society confronting the challenges of commercial expansion. Because the drama probes issues of worth, price, and value, Engle considers it "a local window on the larger economy of which it is part," complete with its stabilities and pitfalls (1). In Shakespeare's model of Venice, all the world's a market. However, the exchange of some "things that come into commerce" was deemed highly inappropriate in Renaissance culture. After all, socially valued concepts like faith, friendship, justice, loyalty, political power, and sexuality ought not be "for sale" as they are here.

Antonio, the merchant of Venice, has acquired some wealth with risky maritime ventures. To procure social clout, he nurtures a friendship with Bassanio, a nobleman as well as resident spendthrift and playboy who, in turn, uses Antonio to keep him in pocket money. In order to repay Antonio and permanently remedy his low cash flow, Bassanio is shopping for a rich wife. Enter Portia, the beautiful, witty, and most eligible heiress of Belmont, who happens to be in the market for a husband but who wants to keep her autonomy in the bargain. Alas, without funds, Bassanio cannot properly court Portia. When he offers Antonio a new deal, to invest in his marriage venture, Antonio lacks immediate cash. His capital is at sea, and his credit in the Christian community appears to have been exhausted. He thus agrees to sign a "merry" bond for a pound of his flesh with the Jewish moneylender Shylock. The much abused Shylock is in the market for some respect and, given the opportunity, power over those who torment him. Meanwhile, Shylock's daughter sells her soul when she robs her father to elope and trade her Jewish faith for a Christian husband. Even Shylock's servant is shopping for new employment with a better benefits package, climbing the socioeconomic ladder much like the rest of Venice, which thrives more on account of personal profit than on Christian charity.

When rumors surface that Antonio's ships have miscarried, Shylock demands his day in court. Bereft of his daughter and personal possessions, and seemingly stuck with a bad loan, he insists on a trial but finds himself at the "mercy" of Portia, who is disguised as the presiding judge. The resourceful "judge" amends Bassanio's reckless endangerment of Antonio's life and relieves her "dear bought husband" of his debt to protect her own assets. She then seizes Shylock's estate to be divided between Antonio and the Venetian coffers and finally makes the alien plaintiff beg for his life. Though pardoned by the doge, the Jew is forced to denounce his religion, his very soul, and to disappear quietly. Even the merchant makes a humble and lonely exit. He owes his life as well as his livelihood to Portia, who now reveals her identity — and the remarkable news that three of his ships have returned to port. Despite the impending celebration of three weddings, *The Merchant* ends on a discordant note.

As Anne Barton observes, "The solitude of Antonio at the end of Act V is without the tragic overtones of Shylock's last appearance but it suggests a link between the two arch-enemies after all: both are voices somehow missing in the final chord" (253). This may not be the only link. While other characters in the play are "blessed" with wealth — that is, are born to it, marry into it or steal it — Shylock and Antonio work for their money, specializing in high-risk professions and generating tax revenues. Their fates hinge on the forces of volatile markets and the political whims of the nobility. Nevertheless, as members of a rapidly growing commercial class whose economic successes could realign the social order, Antonio and Shylock pose a threat to the status quo; their fortunes could be lethal to aristocratic power, especially if they were to collaborate in a venture. In Venice, the Rialto commercial center depended not only on merchants but, "in particular, on Jewish moneylenders who financed ship cargoes" (Kline 20). Italian methods of business organization such as tem-

porary partnerships had spread throughout sixteenth-century western Europe (Ball 193). In England, the formation of joint-stock companies permitted anyone with capital to invest (Knights 52). Better yet, the financial arrangements of partnerships neatly concealed interest since the purchase of stock was "by its very nature not a loan, but a special form of association" (Postan 19). It would be in Portia's interest to keep the merchant and the usurer disassociated. Hence, she fans the fires of Antonio's and Shylock's personal hatred and tightens the reins on their profits and potential clout. Shylock certainly bears the brunt of her preemptive strike, but Antonio, too, suffers an economic setback. The effects of the trial are devastating for both as they become pawns in a system that exploits the fruits of their labor without sharing the risks. Predictably, they react like abused dogs who, blind with rage and afraid to turn against their master, attack each other. Shylock is called a cur, a dog, and a wolf until he finally snaps at Antonio: "Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause, / But since I am a dog, beware my fangs" (3.3.6-7). Divided by hatred and effectively silenced, the merchant and the moneylender are firmly kept in "their place": on the Rialto. Tragically, they play into the hands of the Venetian elite and unwittingly contribute to their own misfortune.

Shakespeare's portrayal of Christian enmity towards the Jew is obvious throughout the play, but the merchant's precarious social position is not as clear to twentieth-century audiences. In fact, critics tend to cast Antonio in a glowing light. Avraham Oz describes him as "Venice's prince of merchants, who retains his gloomy dignity even in court" (93), Anne Barton sees an "indulgent" friend and a "reflective" gentleman (251, 252), and John Gross considers him the better half of "two extreme versions of Economic Man, one benevolent, the other malign": Jekyll-Antonio embodies "the fantasy that you can enjoy the benefits of economic enterprise, and confer them on your society, without being competitive and self-assertive"; by contrast, "Hyde-Shylock is the capitalist as total predator, conferring good on no one except himself. They are two aspects of the same phenomenon; and a tremendous amount of the play's energy is spent keeping them apart" (54). Unfortunately, the dichotomy of "good" and "evil" fails to account for the complexity of Shylock's and the inconsistencies in Antonio's character. Dressed like a prince, the merchant strains to project magnanimity, but he is no gentleman. Ronald Berger notes that in England between 1559 and 1602 expenditures on luxuries and lavish dress not only contributed to the aristocracy's financial crisis but increasingly blurred the lines between social classes (28). Stone confirms that "conspicuous consumption" served a crucial social function: to acquire and maintain status (185). Both Bassanio and Antonio are highly fashionable — and deeply in debt. Yet, as L. C. Knights points out, "ostentation on the part of the new rich is always a matter of derision" (102). Unlike Lord Bassanio, Antonio has no blue blood coursing through his veins (1.1.68, 73). He is addressed and introduced only as "signior," a courtesy title equivalent to "Mr." His predicament is noteworthy because wealth meant social mobility and "membership in the upper class of merchants or the landed Gentry" (Forse 11). So far, Antonio has been unable to turn his wealth into land and the status such an investment would confer. Moreover, his ventures have not afforded him to acquire a gentleman's title,

which indicates that he is not as independently wealthy as he would have us believe. Such a title, after all, and marriage to an aristocratic heiress could well lead to "the financial equivalent of a baron, . . . the usual reward for such entrepreneurial activity" (Stone 192).

According to M. M. Postan, there was hardly an English "merchant of substance" who did not invest in real estate, "be it buying, selling, pledging, or letting it" (15). John Wheeler, whose mercantile capital transformed him into a gentleman landowner, serves as a shining example of a commoner who seized the economic opportunities of early modern England. So does Shakespeare, whose popular wares on the stage afforded him 125 acres of land in 1602 and one of the largest estates in his native Stratford in 1605 (Laroque 58). Certainly, he was no stranger to the perks and pressures of competitive markets. Initially "tarred with the feathers of the upstart crow," Shakespeare outwitted the university wits and built a reputation as a talented writer; his self-fashioned image marked the "first step on the literary and social road of upward mobility" (Bate 18). Bate stresses that before Shakespeare "invented the *profession* of dramatist," writers could not sustain a living by their craft alone and depended on aristocratic or court patronage, which appears to have been Shakespeare's "plan of action" (17). Under the protection of the queen, a patron of the arts, the theater proved to be a most lucrative business venture. According to Forse, it represented "one of the few avenues of free enterprise open to Elizabethans of modest means," offering unique opportunities, relatively few regulations, and enormous earnings (14). Shakespeare found a market niche where he could turn his "artistic skills into commodities subject to the demands of profit" and ranked in the top five percent income bracket of his time (47, 237). François Laroque adds that the actor and playwright had a "taste for wealth" and a "keen eye for profit," and "mercilessly pursued any defaulting debtors" (58). In 1598, Shakespeare applied for a coat of arms, renewing his father's earlier failed effort to raise the family's social status. This time, the petition was granted; in recognition of "good and loyal service" rendered to the Crown, Shakespeare, the grandson of a farmer, officially became a gentleman (59).

Since the acquisition of property was a common means to sociopolitical ascent, Shakespeare's Antonio is no "merchant of substance" — yet. Banking on the hope that his ships will come in, he is poised to make a lateral social move, but for now, he remains a commoner. As Engle writes, the fact that Antonio is legally "bound" to and incarcerated for Bassanio's loan firmly establishes his lower rank: "In England until the mid-seventeenth century a nobleman could not be arrested for debt," but nobles could pledge their servants and social inferiors as sureties (85-6). Significantly, the noble Bassanio does not borrow directly from Shylock but uses a socially inferior middleman to distance himself from the transaction. Further reflecting his lower social status, Antonio's behavior does not exemplify the qualities of a gentleman. While Bassanio is characterized by idleness and a penchant for gambling, both sure signs of an aristocrat, Antonio frets over his business, suggesting lack of refinement. Stone writes that "active personal occupation in a trade or profession was generally thought to be humiliating" (39). In the Venetian pecking order, Antonio ranks somewhere between Bassanio and Shylock, explaining his "extraordinary vio-

lence in repudiating Shylock's attempts to draw parallels between them" (Engle 87). His "reflective" affectations become even more suspicious in view of his tirades against Shylock, who notes with some satisfaction: "Why, look you how you storm!" (1.3.137). The merchant is an emotional tinderbox, revealing a choleric nature behind a melancholy mask. He even admits to playing a "sad part." Gratiano reads him well, refuses to buy his act, and deftly mocks his pretensions with his allusion to the "standing pond" (1.1.88-99). Antonio may not be as deep as he is dull; when his complaints of "want-wit sadness" invite the barbs of a motley crew of friends who beg for a round of repartee, he remains silent. Gratiano's quip that silence is not always golden but sometimes the sign of a fool may be understood more fully in the context of medieval stereotypes about merchants. As Richard Grassby puts it, the "learned merchant was an exception" (351). Benjamin Kedar's account of a thirteenth-century dispute between a Christian merchant and a Jew shows that the average merchant was not known for his intellect or refined sensibilities; a century later, Boccaccio's *Decameron* did little to improve his reputation; and in 1604, Thomas Middleton boldly satirized merchants in *Michaelmas Term* (Kedar 40). Shakespeare's development of the merchant is less pointed, but Antonio is hardly an admirable character.

Throughout the play, the merchant's efforts to gain social recognition or respect are thwarted. Bassanio admits to owing Antonio "the most in money and in love," yet does not hesitate to use him as human collateral and then abandon him. When the bond matures at the end of three months, Bassanio has had no apparent contact with his incarcerated "friend." Even in court, Portia's rhetorical question, "Which is the merchant here? and which the Jew?" (4.1.174) serves to insult Antonio, whose dress would plainly distinguish him from a Jew. His submissive mumblings in the final scene, "Sweet lady, you have given me life and living!" (5.1.286), punctuate his humiliation. Still, the merchant fails to elicit pity; for all his feigned disinterest in profit, everything he does illustrates that profit is his goal (Gross 53). Audiences often mistake the title of the play to refer to Shylock, partly because he is the more compelling character, but also because Antonio manages to deflect "any taint of the counting house. . . . Yet a merchant is what he is, on the grand scale" (53). Terry Eagleton notes that his melancholia is, in fact, "an appropriate neurosis for a profit-based society, discarding the use values of objects in order to plunder them for substance with which to nourish itself" (41). Early on, Antonio boasts to Shylock that his ventures will make "thrice three times the value of this bond" (1.3.159), and that his treasure-laden "argosies," an allusion to the quest for the golden fleece, are due from Tripoli, Mexico, England, Lisbon, Barbary, and India (3.2.268-9). Though Mexico is a poetic stretch since the Spanish-American markets would have been closed to Venice (Gross 53), Antonio's ambition, no doubt, is of global and mythic proportion. Marc Shell proposes that the merchant's lack of marine insurance, a common precaution in Venice as well as in English seaports, illustrates overconfidence and lack of wisdom (54).

Occasionally, Shakespeare's dramatic setting slips from Venice to England. Gratiano's reference to "that royal merchant" (3.2.239) brings to mind the Eliz-

abethan milieu and Wheeler's defense of the royal Merchant Adventurers. The term "ventures," used conspicuously throughout the play, originally denoted the financial and physical risks associated with early maritime expeditions. Then again, it also connotes unscrupulous speculation or the acquisition of fortune by guile. Considering that, in 1597, English merchants were treading on thin political ice, Antonio's appearance on the stage as a figure of suspicion should come as no surprise. Critics pay little attention to the contradictions inherent in Shakespeare's merchant. Anticipating Polonius's advice in *Hamlet*, Antonio loudly proclaims neither to "lend nor borrow" yet quickly breaks his "custom" on both counts, paying mere lip service to an aphorism Elizabethan audiences already dismissed as laughable. A grumbling Shylock informs us that Antonio, too, lends money — albeit "gratis." Christian merchants throughout Europe did lend money indeed but avoided any stipulation of interest by making out the bond for a sum including both principal and interest. According to Walter Cohen, the "very contrast between the two occupations may be seen as a false dichotomy," and he notes that merchants were, in fact, the "leading usurers" (768, 769). Stone writes that interest was forbidden only in theory, "which meant in practice a rate of 12 per cent or more" (183). More importantly, Antonio's debts extend beyond Shylock. His desperate letter to Belmont reveals that other creditors "grow cruel" as well (3.2.316), a fact Tubal confirms in his comment that "divers of Antonio's creditors" are looking for him (3.1.113). Having exhausted his credit in the Christian community, the merchant had no choice but to borrow from a Jew to accommodate the nobleman. "Indulgence" of Bassanio therefore is no sign of martyrdom but a crucial means to gain aristocratic patronage. Shylock's early comment, "How like a fawning publican he looks!" (1.3.41), suggests mercenary motives. To twentieth-century audiences, the idea of lobbying or investing in a public relations campaign presents no ethical dilemma. Nonetheless, it presented a moral one to Elizabethans, who were fleeced by the merchant companies on a regular basis and increasingly protested cronyism and bribery. T. E. Hartley notes that "wining and dining" of English officials by individuals wishing to solicit information or to promote their own interests was, in fact, common practice (171). As a case in point, Francis Bacon, distinguished member of Parliament under Elizabeth I and lord chancellor under James I, retired in disgrace when the House of Lords found him guilty of accepting bribes.

If the merchant's projected image of generosity comes with the profession, so does the usurer's image of thrift. Shylock takes pride in his "well-won" thrift: "And thrift is blessing if men steal it not" (1.3.90). Even his use of language is economical. The business of moneylending, of course, involves not only interest but also the cost of bad loans. When Shylock insists on a trial and declares that usury is "the means whereby I live" (4.1.377), more than revenge is involved: both his reputation and livelihood are at stake. He could ill afford to be thought generous and would have to command a healthy dose of respect to be effectual. Yet, admirable qualities like thrift and respect take on sinister connotations in Shylock and finally spell greed and terror, Machiavellian traits reminiscent of Marlowe's Barabas. The Christian characters almost never refer to Shylock by his name but as a Jew, a "devil," an "evil soul," a "villain with a

smiling cheek," and "rotten at the heart" (1.3.98, 99, 100, 101) as if the terms were synonymous. Their language not only relegates him to a subhuman level but clinches an image that sets the tone for the rest of the play. Precluding justice, it serves to justify the Venetians' foul treatment of Shylock, who protests their abuses in his famous speech.

Though Jews were nearly absent from English history for centuries at a time, caricatures of Jews as phantoms of evil had long been staples of national folklore and literature: cannibalism, poisoning, ritual murder, and sorcery were imagined evils ascribed to Jews (Gross 27). In the theater, Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (1589) had rekindled old hatreds. On the political scene, the sensational trial and execution of Roderigo Lopez, a Marrano Jew and court physician implicated by Essex in a plot to poison the queen, exacerbated public prejudices. Historians suspect that Elizabeth herself never believed the charges against Lopez but yielded to political pressure (32). Despite Lopez's professed innocence, he was hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn in 1594 while a savage mob jeered and laughed amid chants of "He's a Jew!" (33). James Forse marvels at Shakespeare's method of allusion to people and events in the Lopez affair and his stunning "layering and accumulating of clues" (152). Perhaps, as Forse suggests, Shakespeare aimed for "belly laughs, not sympathy" (157), and perhaps he wrote for "prosperity," unlike Jonson, whose literary goal was "posterity" (47). But if Shakespeare slings allusions with verve, it also allows more freedom to tell a story. After all, James Shapiro reminds us, plays are fiction and "in the hands of a talented dramatist, the less easily definable the social and psychological currents a play explores, the greater its potential to haunt and disturb" (121). Unlike Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday*, which Paul Seaver describes as "an antidote to a grim season in a grim time" (87) and which appealed to an "idealized notion of the monarchy as a buffer against social conflict" (Bevington 101), Shakespeare offers no utopian ending. Instead, he leaves social and economic antagonisms unbalanced. Critics such as Jean Howard lament that Shakespeare's drama "encodes the ideologies of the aristocracy" (7), but *The Merchant* hardly brims with geniality toward the elite. It is a cautionary tale in the guise of comedy as it exposes the willingness of the monarch to use occasional force against foreigners to maintain a monopoly on political power. Surely, neither Dekker nor Shakespeare could afford to offend the master of the revels, much less the queen herself. But while Dekker presented "an amalgam of all that popular taste demanded," Shakespeare delved below the surface, taking "popular elements and transform[ing] them to his own purposes" (Knights 195). His allusions to a trial clouded in political intrigue and ending in a gruesome spectacle, and his development of a fictional Jew who commands more respect than the Christian characters, are fraught with ambiguity. At times, we cannot help but think that the bard-turned-businessman, whom Forse describes as "a skinflint, a man who drove shrewd and sharp deals with those who borrowed money from him" (11), might have sided with Shylock.

While Elizabethan audiences loved to hate a Jewish loan shark, Moshe Lazar argues that history does not corroborate the diabolical image "superimposed on the real living Jew living in the shadow of the church" (49). He attributes the "metamorphosis of Jews into devils and gargoyle-like creatures" to the

emergence of Christianity (40). Refusing to compete with Judaism in the same monotheistic faith, the early Christian church drew a battle line between the new congregation (ecclesia) and the old (synagoga), declaring the former supreme and the latter satanic (40, 55). This confrontation is manifest in the iconography of the medieval church throughout Europe (54). Once the Jew was branded a "Christ-killer" and the Adversary himself, his fictional image was disseminated by the church via its "mass media," that is, sermons, plays, and visual arts: "The final canned product of the mythical Jew was now marketable, under a concise dehumanizing label [and] formed an integral part of the 'literature of the illiterate'" (49). Theological anti-Jewish doctrine hence served as a blueprint for the Jew's portrayal on the stage as a bloodthirsty villain who "deserved" contempt. Joseph Shatzmiller's research in the legal archives of England, France, Germany, and Spain on medieval moneylending practices calls for a revised picture of the stereotype mass-marketed by the church and immortalized in early modern drama. Case documents reveal that Jews in litigation with deadbeat Christian clients generally had the Christian courts and public on their side, suggesting that alien moneylenders provided reliable services (7). Schatzmiller further dispels the popular misconception that moneylending was a "depraved" profession; it was a highly competitive trade where Jews vied with Christian pawnbrokers and usurers: "there was no monopoly or cartel at work" (2). Having blazed the trade routes of international commerce, Jewish merchants had long lost their predominant position to Christian maritime contenders and now survived "by exception and privilege rather than by right," ultimately confined to petty moneylending as other occupations became closed to them (Lopez and Raymond 103). Under such conditions, the "cutthroat" Jew of popular literature surely would have lost business to a competitor whose reputation was less disturbing to Christian clients (Schatzmiller 2).

Shakespeare's *Merchant* neatly exposes the gap between Christian rhetoric and practices, as well as the moral contradictions inherent in that necessary evil: usury. To profit was divine as long as the deal remained behind the scenes, but to trade money as a commodity openly, that is, to breed "barren metal," was deemed "unnatural" (Jones 9). Illustrating this paradox, Antonio's and Bassanio's already overextended credit in the Christian community does not keep them from tapping a Jew for cash. And while Shylock takes the risk of accommodating them, Antonio and Bassanio continue to insult him. Although moneylending laws in England had actually been relaxed since 1571, resulting in what Knights calls a "usurer's heyday" (110), Norman Jones points out that despite the dynamic transformation of financial markets, a static conception of credit failed to produce a viable theory to explain and regulate current practices (3). Churches and governments debated credit not in terms of economics but "theological ethics," wrestling with the issue as a moral one (13). Parliamentary debates and anti-usury tracts notwithstanding, the Crown represented "the greatest debtor in England," as Elizabeth routinely relied on forced loans from her merchants, demanding access to a domestic money market in which she was the only buyer (52-3). Credit, no doubt, was an indispensable part of conducting business and formed the financial basis of trade. Europe's rapidly growing markets depended on credit to such an extent that it led to a revival of public

banking in the Mediterranean region and to its introduction in northern Europe (Ball 63). In 1584, Venice established the Banco di Rialto as other major centers of trade followed suit, a development that must have been common knowledge in Renaissance Europe. Lazar proposes that news of yet another monopoly such as the banking industry caused alarm in the population (56). Confronted with the impersonal nature of powerful institutions, human fears tend to project themselves on more accessible collectivities. Historically, the adaptability of the "wandering Jew" to Christian cultures periodically resulted in intense political backlash; already vilified in myth, Jews became chronic scapegoats in times of economic uncertainty (56). In London specifically, Ian Archer writes, xenophobia reigned: "aliens were blamed for problems the causes of which lay elsewhere," allowing the elite to escape criticism and strengthening the causes of the guilds (140). Populist measures against early modern capitalism found expression in campaigns and sermons against "usurers, brokers, badgers, hucksters, and such like locusts that eat up the poor and cause the markets to be inhaunced" (quoted in Archer 53). In the 1590s, the potential for anti-alien riots reached such alarming levels that city officials channeled public fury into "harassment of aliens and foreigners in parliament and the law courts" to keep the populace from stoning them in the streets (140, 259).

Few topics in the economic history of Renaissance Europe yield evidence as copiously as credit, and "the bulk of the evidence consists of records of debts" (Postan 3). In England, the most commonly recorded debt was the bond or "obligation," which included a predetermined penalty clause and constituted the highest form of documentary evidence recognized under common law: "The obligor could not deny or explain away any statement contained in it" (33). A bond could result in a "judgment," a formal acknowledgment by the debtor that should he fail to pay, "execution could henceforth be had against his lands, goods, and person" (35). The legal jargon in *The Merchant* corresponds to the terminology of English common law as Shylock insists on Antonio's bond and its predetermined penalty clause. In view of this, Shylock's "threat" at first is no more than a pun. Had he wanted to kill Antonio, he could have done so more efficiently in the streets of Venice than in a Christian court. As Cohen notes, such a stipulation, after all, "is hardly what one would expect from homo economicus" (769). Not until the court scene does Portia manipulate Shylock into rephrasing his demand for justice into a formal statement of intent to kill (Engle 95). In his address to the doge, Shylock adopts another strategy and touches a dicey issue: he reminds the Venetians that they own "many a purchas'd slave" (4.1.90), human chattel fully sanctioned by the republic. Having "bought" Antonio's pound of flesh under the same contract law, Shylock argues that it is rightfully his: "If you deny me, fie upon your law!" (101). Shell explains that under Roman law, from which Christian contract law derived, life was indeed commensurate with money, and debtors could be sold as slaves or executed for lack of funds (65-7). At first sight, Shylock seems to pose a rhetorical question: if slaves are commodities, then why be so squeamish over a "mere" pound of flesh? But while he is convicted for insisting on the letter of the law, his modest proposal may well aim to expose the Christians' own

appalling practice of trading in human lives. L. C. Knights reports that slave trafficking was carried on mainly by interlopers engaging in "one-sided" trade or plunder (50). Notably, one of Antonio's argosies is returning from Barbary, the North African coastal region including Morocco and notorious in the sixteenth century for piracy and slavery. Yet, Barbara Sebek observes, "Antonio remains squarely in Venice," distancing himself from barbaric commodity exchange and deflecting attention from the Christian economic community's "unsavory features" (185, 194). Imperialistic early modern Europe held incoherent views on the issue of slavery. The English monarch officially condemned such "detestable" practices as "would call down the Vengeance of Heaven upon the Undertakers" (quoted in Greenblatt 23). At the same time, she not only invested in the voyages of John Hawkins, who sold African slaves to the New World, but even loaned him her ships (23). Slavery provided functional value that was irreconcilable with social values, but while it raised moral concerns, those concerns competed with "cold calculations of profit and loss" (Epstein 226).

While subsidizing merchants to exploit the riches of other nations, including their inhabitants, Renaissance policy makers realized that global commerce inevitably effected change that was as much cultural as it was economic. According to Russ McDonald, the extent of the slave import in Shakespeare's England was significant, causing sufficient concern for the queen to issue several edicts against "the great number of Negroes and Blackamoors . . . carried into the realm" (273). As Stephen Greenblatt confirms, the idea that foreign influences could somehow "pollute" Englishness, whatever that meant, spawned anxiety (24). *The Merchant*, too, reflects fear and confusion over cultural difference. While busily profiting from slavery, the Venetians self-righteously insist on casting cultural "others" in inferior roles instead. Portia, aware of her own status as a commodity, aggressively negotiates the conditions for her marriage contract, but recoils from the very idea of exchanging vows with Morocco. His dark "complexion" and boasts of sexual prowess relegate him to an uncivilized role, posing what Sebek calls "muted threats of intercultural sexual commerce" (193). While the aristocratic Portia rejects such exchange, her servant Launcelot exploits it. Having impregnated a Moorish slave in Portia's household, he then ridicules the woman's lack of chastity (3.5.35). The portrayal of both Portia's exotic suitor and her slave in purely sexual, even promiscuous terms, serves to denigrate and call into question their worth as persons. Camille Wells Slights writes that "the profitability of slave labor created a need to rationalize the dehumanization of black-skinned Africans," and she hints at a tentative connection between England's Merchant Adventurers and the slave trade (381, 385). John Wheeler's references to slavery in the *Treatise*, however, would indicate that he did not want to be associated with such practices; in a revealing passage, Wheeler condemns certain "cunning merchants" who "make traffic of the skins and blood of other men, . . . persuade and induce men to suffer themselves to be bought and sold, and [make] merchandize of men's souls" (quoted in Hotchkiss 316-17). Whether heartfelt conviction or the rhetoric of a desperate man trying to appease the queen and the public, Wheeler's comments do suggest that human bondage presented a moral issue. Engle wonders

about the "lack of any rebuttal to Shylock's speech about slavery," particularly since it "forces attention to questions about the moral rights of persons and how such rights interact with property rights and with luck in birth" (101-2). The "tawny" Jew offers a new perspective from someone forced to the margin of society, a voice of reason pointing to the hypocrisies in the lives of both the drama's denizens and its early modern audiences. Though he remains "irreducibly alien," Shylock represents one of the few dramatic characters who, according to Greenblatt, have "a surprising instability in the Elizabethan imagination and may appear for brief, intense moments as powerful models to be admired and emulated before they resume their place as emblems of despised otherness" (24). When we consider that Shakespeare was familiar with the essays of Montaigne, who, on the brink of the Enlightenment, stood at a critical distance from the mores of his time and openly denounced Europe's cultural myopia (Pinciss and Lockyer 20), Shylock's speech deserves closer analysis.

Regardless of Shylock's intent, the Christian court hardly represents the spirit of the law as Portia comes "perilously close to promoting 'private law'" (Eagleton 37). The fact that the doge is caught sympathizing with the defendant before the trial, that Portia impersonates a member of the judiciary who could not be more partial, and that the defendant gets to amend the verdict makes for delightful comedy on one hand. But when we examine the personal and political motivations of the characters, the Christian victory seems hollow. Rather than idealize Venice, as Richard Mackenney fears (232), Shakespeare deflates the myth of Venice as a paragon of civic virtue as well as the myth of Christian compassion and sympathy. Surely, Portia's disparaging comments about the state of corruption and Bassanio's cynical insights about the law do not reflect well on the republic. Here, justice means punishment, which hovers somewhere between retribution and vengeance. Portia's comment in the trial scene, "The Jew shall have all justice . . . / He shall have nothing but the penalty" (4.1.321-2), strongly suggests that her final judgment was predetermined. And when the "judge" pontificates on the quality of mercy, it is difficult to ignore the pun on *merces* (Latin for reward or gain), which defines her goal of procuring a marriage contract. Eagleton considers Portia's mercy "a lavishly gratuitous gesture" as she "disregards the precise exchanges of credit and debt, crime and punishment" and then expects the same cavalier treatment from Shylock, a social outcast "whose sole protection is the law" (41). The victimized, however, "need a fixed contract" and "would be foolish to rely on the generosity of their oppressors," who control the rules of the game and have the power "to dispense with exact justice from time to time." As Shylock deconstructs Venetian law, he is "triumphantly vindicated" (37) despite losing his case; "he has forced the Christians into outdoing his own 'inhuman' legalism." If anything, the courtroom scene turns a glaring spotlight on the interconnectedness of economics with politics and the judiciary. Shakespeare unmasks and satirizes Venetian jurisprudence, which seems founded neither on ancient virtues nor on law and order. Clearly, the law is not blind to social difference, as Antonio's incarceration for Bassanio illustrates, nor is it blind to racial and cultural difference, as evident in the sensational court scene (Engle 86). Aside from discovering a separate clause for aliens in Venetian civic law, the "judge" panders to racial hatred when she allows hecklers like Gratiano to work the crowd. This

not only creates the conditions to convict the Jew with the full backing of the public, which feels "good" that the Jew is made to suffer, but ruthlessly precludes justice. Eagleton notes that Portia's "ingenious quibbling would be ruled out of order in a modern court" (37). Even in a utilitarian sense, Portia's solution fails to set Venice on a moral course for the future. The treatment of justice in *The Merchant* sharply contrasts with the kind of justice dispensed in the social microcosm of *Twelfth Night*, which provides a safety net even for unrelenting offenders. Puritan or not, the abusive Malvolio is his own worst enemy, and when his peers scheme against him, we feel that he deserves it. Lady Olivia nonetheless intervenes, ameliorates the grievances of her mean-spirited servant, and continues her support even after he threatens revenge. The implication that Malvolio's humiliation has been punishment enough is echoed by the duke, who invites him back. Conversely, Shylock in *The Merchant* leaves the stage a broken man: "I pray you give me leave from hence, / I am not well" (4.1.395-6). When the doge says, "Get thee gone, but do it" (398), Shylock refuses to be the traditional comic senex described by Jonathan Bate (127). While the Jew is singled out and punished, usury will surely continue behind the scenes, leading Shell to conclude that "the aristocratic court of Portia cannot long exist without a day of reckoning in the court of tragedy" (83).

Avraham Oz examines the prophetic qualities of *The Merchant* in view of history as Shylock's disappearance in act 4 symbolizes the fate of Shylock's tribe throughout Europe up to and including the haunting events of the twentieth century (5). Seen through the lens of economics, Jews "served for simultaneously upholding and denigrating necessary, yet ideologically abominable early capitalist practices" that were antithetical, at least theoretically, to communally oriented Renaissance values (8-9). The capitalist resources of Jews nonetheless sustained the aristocracy in times of economic instability (11). The age of Shakespeare ushered in a transitory period of a new monetary system where "profit and credit are shaking the constancy and regular course of traditional possession" (27-8). Portia's heartfelt sigh, "O, these naughty times / Puts bars between the owners and their rights" (3.2.18-19), reveals her worst fear: a collapse of the oligarchy. Her medieval worldview of wealth as a finite commodity explains Portia's determination to keep Shylock and Antonio in inferior roles: to bankroll the good life at Belmont. Portia correctly identifies Antonio as a threat to the aristocracy. His citizenship combined with potential landholdings could soon allow him to demand a greater say in government operations. Shylock's alien status precludes any such rights. Furthermore, Jews were restricted from access to guilds, training, and even markets. Shylock's portrayal as a perceived danger in the Christian economic community is all the more vexing when we consider that in the early 1600s, as usury lost some of its stigma, London's wealthiest merchants abandoned the hazards of overseas trading and turned exclusively to the business of moneylending (Stone 532). Norman Jones reports a "new attitude toward usury crystallizing in England's consciousness" as "fewer and fewer people were willing to condemn merchants and usurers in the same breath" (173).

While other characters in *The Merchant* depict Shylock in Machiavellian terms, it is Portia who reveals herself as quite the Ideal Princess. She boldly seizes her moment of power, practices deceit, duplicity, hypocrisy, and intimi-

dation, and strikes fear into the hearts of Shylock, Antonio, and Bassanio. Even the doge is ineffectual as he yields to the "councilor" who tweaks the law to serve her purpose. Here, the setting of the play offers another rich historical parallel. Myths of the Venetian polity's stability aside, the uniqueness of the Italian commercial giant "lay in its apparent immunity to rebellion in a world of conflict" (Mackenney 232-4). In medieval Venice, an inner ring of self-elected councilors reserved the power to reinterpret laws; if a law failed to advance their goal, they consulted again and could mobilize, even against the doge, the Council of Ten (Trevor-Roper 120). By the fifteenth century, the doge had been reduced to a mere figurehead: "seven doges had been assassinated, nine had been blinded and exiled, twelve had abdicated, one had been sentenced to death and beheaded, two had been deposed. But after that . . . all is peace in the republic" (108, 118). In the sixteenth century, a constitutional amendment restricted the authority of the Council of Ten, but the role of the Doge remained largely ceremonial. Unlike the Venetian Council of Ten, England's late-Elizabethan privy council of ten was dealing with no mere figurehead. The monarch reigned supreme and, along with her councilors, formed the center of government; Parliament played an advisory role and was called upon to levy taxes and grant subsidies (Epstein 3). The queen maintained a tacitly symbiotic relationship with her governing elite to address public grievances and contain civic tensions; solidarity of the elite was "key to political stability in the 1590s" (Guy 10). Like Venice, the government of the corporation of London was oligarchic, its function to preserve law and order (Mackenney 235). According to Archer, "Executive power lay with the court of (26) aldermen," 24 of whom belonged to the Merchant Adventurers' Company and held considerable judicial power, interpreting the constitution to their advantage and governing the city for their own profit (18). Not to be outdone, assize judges sat alongside privy councilors and remolded criminal law to punish offenses against private property as public crimes (Guy 10). As the establishment felt itself "increasingly beleaguered" by plebeian forces, it "considered intolerance to be a virtue and named it 'justice'" (Archer 18-19). If the queen was "frugal in her distribution of knighthoods," she was downright stingy in the creation of new peerages, granting fewer titles than either her father or her successor (Stone 97). At a time of rapid changes in landownership, her conservatism predictably created "an ever-widening breach between title and status on the one hand and power and wealth on the other" (98). Even when mortality thinned the ranks of the privy council to fewer than half its original members, she refused to replace them (Guy 4). Paul E. J. Hammer proposes that the queen feared being dictated by her male subjects; unable to dominate them in the fashion of a king, she hence "chose to divide and rule" (77). At the same time, she did not tolerate divisive politics by her courtiers or members of the privy council, as Essex came to find out.

Although Portia and Shylock may seem to inhabit different worlds, they share dangerous common ground after all: both lack political power. In patriarchal Venice, where government, law, religion, and business deny her participation as a citizen, the heiress is as vulnerable as the alien. Portia inherited her father's estate by default, not right, and the existence of a brother would have nixed her good fortune. Considering her narrow choices, it is difficult to blame

Portia for taking care of herself in a world where every institution is against her, where she is referred to as a "golden fleece," and where her husband puts a wager of 1,000 ducats on their first male child. Tempting though it may be for twentieth-century audiences to cheer Portia's subversive resourcefulness, Jean Howard cautions that Portia's role on the Elizabethan stage merely served to perpetuate the silent assumption that women are "universally prone to deception and impersonation" (60-1). While this leaves Portia in a dilemma, it makes the result of her actions no less disturbing. By choosing injustice over disruptive change, she is guilty of feeding the very system she aims to subvert. Portia carefully weighs her opportunity costs, forces Shylock to sell his soul, yet makes a cozy deal to keep hers: "How little is the cost I have bestowed / In purchasing the semblance of my soul" (3.4.19-20). Firmly entrenched at Belmont and insisting on her upper-class privilege, the heiress washes herself of hard-won bargains and "well-won thrift." Gross observes that "[t]he most solid money in the play is Portia's. It is old money, clean money"; nevertheless, somebody must have amassed the family fortune, if not her "ever-virtuous father," then perhaps one of his less virtuous forebears (50). Portia likes to reap the benefits of trade but is a reluctant capitalist who refuses to share the exchange with anyone else. Unable to fathom a world where all players may pursue their own economic interests, unimpeded in their trade, and where their choices lead to the best outcome for society as a whole, Portia keeps a cool eye on her own interests by preventing others from rising above their station. Alas, her hand in Venetian affairs could not be more visible — nor detrimental. Shylock and Antonio may seem like small fish in the canal, but they form crucial economic links: Venice needs merchants and moneylenders. At worst, Shylock's crippled capacity to finance struggling entrepreneurs such as Antonio could destroy both. At best, it will shift supply and demand, boost inflation, and spawn public unrest. Rather than allow and encourage risk-takers to succeed in their trade, Portia's contract with Venice is bound to harm every member in the economic chain — including her own class, which utterly depends on revenue. In spite of herself, she creates the perfect conditions for a major economic crisis leading to social upheaval that will tip the scales of political power. But Portia cannot prevent the evolution of commercial markets, which, set in motion, will continue to expand and threaten the established order. Even those who cheat shamelessly are bit players in a larger scheme of commerce where the Shylocks and the Antonios can only temporarily be stripped of their resources. From the standpoint of the late twentieth century, as corporate mergers and downsizing raise new questions about the ethics of discarding human potential, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* offers insightful commentary on Renaissance worldviews and enduring conflicts between economics and ethics.

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Black Feminisms and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

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As a narrative, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* reflects Black feminist textualities on two levels: one, in the temperament of its collaborative authorship; and two, in its engagement of what I will call interior tropes of activism.[1] This is a shocking statement, especially considering the well-documented sexism of *Autobiography*'s subject, Malcolm X,[2] which at the very best reflects immaturity and his untimely death,[3] and which at worst reflects his participation in the maintenance of a system of gender oppression that undermined his own revolutionary practice. Cultural criticism of *Autobiography* rarely anticipates connections between the text and Black women's political realities; thus, this essay operates on a leap of faith, and its central aim is to contribute to a re-figuration of how *Autobiography* is read, understood, and engaged. It argues that *Autobiography* is inflected with and earns from the contributions Black women have made to Black resistance and living. As a leap of faith, it asks, even invites, the reader momentarily to suspend familiar critical readings of *Autobiography* for the possibility of engaging an/other underexplored textuality that I believe firmly undergirds the power, volatility, and contradictions of this now classic narrative.

My choice to use *Autobiography* as my text of critique may raise concern because the text has been long understood as unreliable, heavily constructed, and controversial. Malcolm's most noted biographer, Bruce Perry, for example, argues that the transformations in his life were not nearly as dramatic as portrayed in *Autobiography*, and that the text is largely

exaggerated.[4] Perry may be correct, but it is equally true that the convention of autobiography itself depends on dramatization and exaggeration.

In using *Autobiography*, I am working with a text that has many gaps, that is neither highly reliable nor comprehensive. Yet it serves my purposes here well, because even in its indeterminacy, ambiguity, and playfulness, it is still the most stable and referential signifier of Malcolm as a cultural sign. It is, quite honestly and somewhat unfortunately, *the* work by which most people "know" Malcolm, and therefore it is worthy of attention. Furthermore, the text is a "lieu de memoire," a literal site of memory in African-American historical, social, and psychic context. Like Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* or Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, *Autobiography* has and is a life of its own, a life that is timely and timeless, extending beyond its writer(s), subjects, or moment. The text is not only a cultural commodity but, literally, an icon.[5] For these reasons, I will largely refer to *Autobiography* itself as my subject, and where direct references to Malcolm offer greater elegance, I still refer to the persona of Malcolm as presented by this text.

Autobiography, Collaboration, and Girlfriends on a Sitting Porch

One way that Black feminist textualities manifest themselves in *Autobiography* is via the particular form of the narrative — an autobiography written as a collaboration — and the dynamic coupling that the text facilitates between (even demands of) Malcolm X and Alex Haley. Noted scholars of the genre have successfully argued that it is inventive, is a making of a self as much as the presentation of a made self.[6] An autobiographical text is, according to Albert Stone, overdetermined, for it is an "occasion, . . . [a] performance" (164), or an occasion *to* and *for* performance. Autobiography, then, holds the potential to be transgressive, especially in its invitation to play and its predisposition to instability.[7]

Part of this play, Julia Swindells notes, is the genre's mediation "between subject and author" (1), a mediation through which autobiography confers a mask.[8] This autobiographical mediation is often textually embodied in one person or persona, with the mask as a layer over the body of the author-subject. Yet with *Autobiography*, a collaboration between Haley and Malcolm, the masked persona is not readily attributable to either collaborator. The collaborative relationship here heightens the genre's performative and ludic qualities. Hence, Swindells' suggestion of a mediation between subject and author literally and materially exists and is manifested in the negotiations between Malcolm's self and (public) persona and Haley's self and (public) persona. This negotiation is phenomenal, especially considering the contemporary public profiles of both men. Albert Stone, who has most thoroughly explored collaborative autobiographies, argues that the resultant text of collaboration exists in a place "in-between two minds" and is a blurring of the autobiographical processes of self-authentication and self-identification, because the "self" in question is not materially singular (154-5). In fact, it is hard to name definitively all the bodies that constitute this particular collaborative negotiation: Malcolm's and

Alex's public personae, their private, personal, non-public selves, and, most significantly, the persona of the text that they create but do not ultimately or entirely control. These various personae participate in the negotiation of the text: Malcolm tells Alex that "[n]othing can be in this book's manuscript that I didn't say and nothing can be left out that I want in" (387), which seemingly declares *Autobiography* to be Malcolm's text. But, as Stone points out, "Haley won an equally significant concession: 'I asked for — and he gave — his permission that at the end of the book I could write comments of my own about him which would not be subject to his review'" (Stone 160). Negotiations like these, so evident under *Autobiography*'s surfaces, lead Stone correctly to reject Malcolm's assertion that "a writer is what I want, not an interpreter" (456), calling the distinction "illusory" (A. Stone 160).

Stone's comments are in reference to passages from the Epilogue written by Haley after Malcolm's death. The Epilogue is the most revelatory section of *Autobiography* but is also deceptive because it aims to put a face on the writer, Haley, and thereby to maintain the authenticity of the text's singular voice. Readers are encouraged to think of Malcolm's voice as prominent and distinct (and distinguishable) from Haley's, and also to attribute the shifts in textual voice exclusively to Malcolm's maturation, to his growing pains. As John Edgar Wideman argues, "the peculiar absence of [certain] . . . narrative strategies . . . presents a 'talking head,' first-person narration recorded from the fixed perspective of a single video camera" (104). What Haley achieves is a deception, with "little fuss . . . [and] a quiet mastery of the medium," that allows him to disappear as author, to be seamlessly self-effaced from the text (104, 106).

The Epilogue, as Wideman notes, introduces "the process of constructing the book . . . [and] the relationship between writer and subject" (105). In one way, the Epilogue reminds us that the text is a collaboration and thus confounds the gesture of singularity that is so central to an autobiography's veracity and power; still, the Epilogue affirms that singularity by assuring the reader that, except for these 74 pages, the rest of the text is brother Malcolm's. In this way, the Epilogue is an indeterminate, multiple textuality and in its indeterminacy perhaps best represents the playful and roaming quality of Malcolm's and Alex's collaborative voice.

It is in this voice, a voice that characterizes the dynamic and collaborative relationship between Malcolm and Alex, that a Black feminist textuality emerges. On the basis of this collaboration, I want to read Malcolm and Alex as two men engaging a Black feminist and womanist practice of sharing, talking, and creating story, like girlfriends on a sitting porch,[9] like Pheoby and Janie in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. I am using the term "girlfriends" in order to invoke a signal trope in Black women's writings: particular and material friendships that exist between women and that hint at a larger tradition of being girls with and for each other. This model of friendship foregrounds issues of self and other in a dialectic where each woman identifies with and as the other. The identification is a loving, dynamic process of political, psychic, and physical engagement and urgency.[10] There is evidence in *Autobiography* that the relationship between Alex and Malcolm was like this: dynamic, volatile, a collaboration as a journey of love, with each man becoming

more intimately committed to the other's life. *Autobiography* is created in a space of earned mutuality, in which two men learn from each other and shape their actions and needs in relation to the other. Theirs is, as Stone writes, an "intricate interaction . . . [in which] Malcolm's passionate desire to historicize his existence . . . is not bypassed but actually sharpened by Haley's psychological probings" (161).

I am claiming this relationship as Black feminist because images of the particular camaraderie I am describing are especially prevalent in the works of Black women. In offering this reading, I am suggesting that there are strong resonances of Black women's cultural and political productions readily accessible in Black traditions. These resonances are often unattributed specifically to Black women and hence engaged without conscious intent of "acting in a Black woman way." It is possible, then, that two men such as Alex and Malcolm could engage a trope of Black feminism — girlfriending each other — that they encountered in and adapted from Black culture in general.

This claim requires a bit of explanation, and is made clearer in Alice Walker's essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," which explores the seeming invisibility of Black women's artistry in spite of other evidence of their talents. Walker argues that, historically, Black women were "artist[s] who left [their] mark in the only materials [they] could afford" and, "more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read" (238, 239). Walker notes the anonymity that is inherent in Black women's creative processes, where proper acknowledgment for either process or product is rarely made or even possible.[11] And yet the impact of these processes and products, and hence of Black women as cultural producers, is undeniable: in talking about her mother's garden work, Walker writes,

> Whatever she planted grew as if by magic, and her fame as a grower of flowers spread over three counties. Because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen through a screen of blooms. . . . She has handed down respect for the possibilities — and the will to grasp them. . . . For her, so hindered and intruded upon in so many ways, being an artist has still been a daily part of her life. This ability to hold on, even in very simple ways, is work black women have done for a very long time. (241-2)

Walker's mother, a woman "who literally covered the holes in our walls with sunflowers" (242), is a consummate artist, one whose response to living in oppressed conditions is to hold on and to create. Hers is a creative and a *political* response, one that Walker identifies as a womanist way of living.

The quiet quality that Walker identifies in her mother's (and other Black women's) production partly contributes to the invisibility that production has in public spaces. The creative process is interiorized yet yields exterior and public results. Walker describes the creativity as "that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the black woman has inherited, and that pops out in wild and unlikely places to this day" (239). Coupled with the char-

acteristic quietness is the largely unassuming way in which this tradition of creation is passed from Black woman to Black children, female *and* male. Walker explains that

> no song or poem will bear my mother's name. Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories. Only recently did I fully realize this: that through years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories — like her — must be recorded. (240)

These stories, which came from her mother's "lips as naturally as breathing," are fairly common gestures of survival and liberation that are part of the immense contribution of Black women to their communities and to history. Walker's use of "absorb" reflects the unassuming way in which this transfer of ideology occurs, and she emphasizes that it was not just the stories but also the "manner" that was transmitted to her; not just the "what" but also the "how" of it. Walker's exploration of her mother's garden offers a framework for understanding some of the dynamics of the textual and ideological contributions that Black women make to Black culture. Ironically, while this pooling of Black cultural resources makes Black women's contributions widely accessible, it also serves symbolically to separate Black women from their contributions: that is, while Black women's work and thoughts are highly influential in public spaces, it is mostly Black male voices and bodies that are rendered visible in those same spaces (for example, in "the Black Church" or the Civil Rights Movement). Hence, Black women's ideological presence in Black culture often manifests itself in hidden or submerged textualities. My argument, then, engages this notion of an abundant pool of Black women's cultural and political contributions — a reservoir that is Black public domain and can be accessed sub- and unconsciously — to assert the influence of Black women's "gardens" on the rhetorical designs of *Autobiography*, most specifically in the relationship between Alex and Malcolm. In fact, Haley is noted for a predisposition toward Black women's culture, having grown up in the company of his grandmother and other women, and for a gift of and interest in inhabiting a persona.[12]

The relationship between Alex and Malcolm is a striking one: these two Black men were public figures in their own right, each significantly different from the other in politics and interests. Yet their task, the production of a text, necessitated a coming together, so that each man had to become interested in the other. "Who is this man, this man Malcolm," Haley must have asked, with a piqued and imaginative heart still beating from their *Playboy* interview a few years earlier. Considering Malcolm's deep interest in Black people, he must also have wondered, "This man, the one who writes for *Reader's Digest* and *Playboy*, who is he?" Historically, not much has been made of the relationship between the two men: Perry's *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America* fails to address the nature of their relationship, while Mary Seibert McCauley's *Alex Haley, A Southern Griot: A Literary Biography* summarizes the plot of *Autobiography* without discussing the relationship between her subject

and Malcolm. Such oversights are in fact very common. Most of the reviews of *Autobiography* and later interviews with Haley give the collaboration moderate treatment at best. The oversight is best represented by I. F. Stone's lengthy review of *Autobiography* for the *New York Review of Books*; his only comment on Haley reads, "From tape-recorded conversations, a Negro writer, Alex Haley, put together the *Autobiography*; he did his job with sensitivity and devotion" (4). The outstanding exception of the twenty reviews I read is Truman Nelson's for *The Nation*, which acknowledges the import and revelatory quality of *Autobiography*'s Epilogue. Additionally, biographical pieces on Haley tend to privilege his work on *Roots*; in fact, Haley was not acknowledged on the cover of the first edition of *Autobiography*, for though he was a writer of some repute, he was not the public figure that Malcolm was at the time of the text's publication.[13]

The relationship between Alex and Malcolm began when Alex interviewed Malcolm for *Playboy* magazine in 1962. Prior to that interview, Haley was little more than a struggling writer. He had been assigned to a specially created journalist post while in service with the Coast Guard, where he wrote sea stories and had a few small publishing successes. In 1959, upon retiring from the Guard, Haley started freelancing his essays and in early 1962 scored big with an interview of jazz great Miles Davis for *Playboy*, a piece that led to the Malcolm X interview a few months later. An editor at Doubleday, having read the interview, approached Haley about writing a book on Malcolm, and though Malcolm was initially reluctant, he changed his mind two days later. After getting the blessing and approval of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm and Alex agreed to terms — Malcolm noting that the book would be dedicated to Muhammad and all funds would go to the Nation of Islam, while outlining what time he could commit. These negotiations and the first few interview sessions were businesslike, dispassionate, even as both men were dazzled by and anxious about each other. In spite of the absence of critical attention to their relationship, it is clear that the two men did develop a relationship with each other; this relationship would be a critical one, for it cemented Malcolm's legacy as a historical figure and catapulted Alex to the ranks of major American writers.

The nature and quality of this relationship, both in what is presented in the (literal) margins of the text and in what I can actively and reasonably imagine, calls to mind two sisterfriends on the porch, sharing and weaving the magic of story, the way Black women talk with each other as girlfriends. The production of the text necessitated a kind of trust and love and *tenderness* between these two men that is not commonly imagined or represented in interactions between heterosexual Black men. At one point in the text, Malcolm comments on trust and gender in a way that bears significance here:

> I [Haley] somehow raised the subject of women. Suddenly, between sips of coffee and further scribbling and doodling, he vented his criticisms and skepticisms of women. "You never can fully trust any woman," he said. "I've got the only one I ever met whom I would trust seventy-five per cent. . . . I don't *completely* trust anyone," he went on, "not even myself. I have seen too many men destroy themselves. . . . You I trust about twenty-five percent." (389)

The small amount of trust he initially ascribes to Haley develops into a sweet relationship that Haley later describes as a "mutual camaraderie that, although it was never verbally expressed, was a warm one" (399). In fact, Malcolm later revises his assessment of Haley, cementing their (unarticulated) brothership:

> One call that I [Haley] never will forget came at close to four A.M., waking me; he must have just gotten up in Los Angeles. His voice said, "Alex Haley?" I said, sleepily, "Yes? Oh, hey, Malcolm!" His voice said, "I trust you seventy per cent" — and then he hung up. I lay a short time thinking about him and I went back to sleep feeling warmed by that call, as I still am warmed to remember it. Neither of us ever mentioned it. (400)

This warmth, as Haley repeatedly describes it, is the sharing of story, and like Betty Shabazz's speeches and books that have served to remember and memorialize her husband, Haley's Epilogue serves to remember and celebrate a man he knew and loved. And Haley did love him, learned to love and admire him not only as a public figure — the Malcolm who was an icon of Black nationalist power for Black America, or the face of fear for so much of white America — but especially as Malcolm, a brother man sitting across the way, or on the other end of the telephone, whose precious steps toward liberation were warming, scary, funny . . . and a mirror to Haley's own living. As Malcolm's love and trust for Haley grew, one can be sure that Haley's love and trust for Malcolm also grew. The successful co-authorship is reflective of a Black feminist aspect of the text; it is the product of one Black man loving and talking with another, developing a trust that matches the trust (and mistrust) he had of his own wife.

The presence of this Black feminist textuality is not uncomplicated, for it exists alongside Malcolm's comments on trust and *gender*, which vividly reflect his and perhaps Alex's sexism, and it partially results in the limited representation of Betty in the text. In fact, this situation is emblematic of how Black feminist textualities manifest themselves in *Autobiography*: as if corroborating Walker's account of the invisibility of Black women's cultural contributions, the presence of Black feminist gestures in the text often coincides with and runs up against manifestations of sexism that serve to erase and violate the gestures themselves. A central example of this tendency can be seen in the text's depiction of Malcolm's mother, Louise Little, and in the function she serves in the development of the relationship between Malcolm and Haley. In the epilogue, Haley tells us that a previously hesitant and uncooperative Malcolm unexpectedly opened up when asked about his mother:

> Then one night, Malcolm X arrived nearly out on his feet from fatigue. For two hours, he paced the floor delivering a tirade against Negro leaders who were attacking Elijah Muhammad and himself. I don't know what gave me the inspiration to say once when he paused for breath, "I wonder if you'd tell me something about your mother?"
>
> Abruptly he quit pacing, and the look he shot at me made me sense that somehow the chance question had hit him. When I look back at it now, I

> believe I must have caught him so physically weak that his defenses were vulnerable.
>
> Slowly, Malcolm X began to talk, now walking in a tight circle. "She was always standing over the stove, trying to stretch whatever we had to eat. We stayed so hungry that we were dizzy. I remember the color of dresses she used to wear — they were a kind of faded-out gray. . . ." And he kept on talking until dawn, so tired that the big feet would often almost stumble in their pacing. From this stream-of-consciousness reminiscing, I finally got out of him the foundation for this book's beginning chapters. . . . After that night, he never again hesitated to tell me even the most intimate details of his personal life . . . (390)

This moment is crucial because it introduces Louise Little's politics of survival as resonant in Malcolm's memory and perhaps influential in his own political development, but also because it is this memory that triggers the sharing that cemented a dynamic collaborative relationship between Haley and Malcolm. In one way, the text that we have is largely the result of Malcolm's memory of his mother, since it is she who facilitates the relationship between her son and Haley. Malcolm later on realizes the power of this memory and its influence on his politics:

> "It [Haley's question] made me face something about myself," Malcolm X said. "My mind had closed about our mother. I simply didn't feel the problem [his mother's being in a mental hospital] could be solved, so I had to shut it out. I had built up subconscious defenses. The white man does this. He shuts out of his mind, and he builds up subconscious defenses against anything he doesn't want to face up to. I've just become aware how closed my mind was now that I've opened it up again. That's one of the characteristics I don't like about myself. If I meet a problem I feel I can't solve, I shut it out. I make believe that it doesn't exist. But it exists." (393)

What is most stunning about all this is the indelible presence Louise Little has in *Autobiography* and her simultaneous absence from many parts of the text. Her influence is far-reaching: the text later narrates Malcolm's efforts with his siblings to remove his mother from a mental institution as another signal moment in his life; moreover, during Malcolm's outrageous "harlemite" days, "[t]he only thing that brought [him] down to earth was the visit to the state hospital" where his mother was (79). One wonders if the picture we do get of Louise Little, marginal as it is, is not further evidence of the collaborative nature of the text, especially considering Haley's interest in women and their influence on the lives of the children they raise; it seems that Haley teases out this memory via his questions to Malcolm. Still, it is ironic at best, and damning at worst, that Louise Little's contributions to Alex's and Malcolm's textual reverie become a barely present backdrop in the landscape that is *Autobiography*.[14]

Even as the result of Malcolm's and Alex's love — the text — fulfills Marlon Riggs's proclamation of the revolutionary potential in Black men loving

each other,[15] then the liberation of this revolutionary act is undercut by what is presumably the merged and perhaps subconscious sexism of the Haley-Malcolm collaboration. Their homosocial connection, because it lacks a commitment to feminist practice, also serves to affirm sexism, particularly the erasure of women from textual spaces that they, women, help to make possible. This is one of the tensions of *Autobiography*.

I would argue that it is in (or because of) the volatile play of making this autobiography that some of the hidden textualities of Black feminism surface. In the merging of Alex's voice with Malcolm's; in the revealing of previously untold secrets — wishes, fears, longings, revealed layer by layer as sweet furtiveness; in the coming together that makes closeness a dangerous but inevitable thing, each man eventually whispering "you mine, you mine" like characters in *Beloved*; in the voyeurism where each man's wanting to look in on another Black man's public living becomes his wanting to *become* that other living — in all of this we see pieces of the made-up, written-down journey that becomes *Autobiography*. Within the dynamic of self-making and collaboration is a third space, where yet other voices exist and can be heard, including Black feminist textualities . . . and where we confront the unbelievable truth that part of what is appealing about *Autobiography* is rooted in Black women's ways of living.

Journey, Activism, and Interiority

Bearing in mind that any comment about the content of *Autobiography* is informed by this collaborative dynamic, I want to explore the formulation of a self's journey that the narrative foregrounds. Malcolm X's status as an African-American cultural icon is determined largely by his autobiography's engagement of personal self as the location of public political rhetoric. The narrative creates a persona that is public but that also possesses an unusual sense of being real and common, familiar and unsettled. This sense of realness enhanced Malcolm's appeal during his life and is the source of his posthumous persistence as a folk hero, including his cultural resurgence in the 90s. In her essay, "Sitting at the Feet of the Messenger: Remembering Malcolm X," bell hooks describes this realness as Malcolm's power to engage his readers/audience through his own committed and personal engagement with issues of racial self-love: "His *awakening* to critical consciousness . . . stimulated our awakening. As readers we witnessed his struggles to throw off the yoke of racism, *following him through various stages of self-recovery*. . . . Most readers of *The Autobiography* are moved by his quest for self-realization" (*Yearning* 79; emphasis added). Like many readers, hooks identifies with *Autobiography's* presentation of Malcolm as openly struggling, an openness that is often uncharacteristic of leaders of such prominence.

The "quest for self-realization" that hooks describes is commonly the subject of autobiography, a genre that frequently dramatizes an individual's journey to a point of completion. But Malcolm's autobiography resists a trajectory of completion. Paul John Eakin asserts that the text undercuts the construct of the "autobiographical fiction of the completed self" (156),[16] highlighting a

familiar claim of critical discourse about Malcolm X: that he was a person whose life and politics resisted easy codification. Even in the face of attempts to define his positions narrowly — including the well-known CBS news story "The Hate that Hate Produced" — Malcolm's life retained an elusive quality.[17] This elusiveness, central to the rhetorical success and social popularity of his autobiography, is manifested as a negotiation of multiplicity and fragmentation, a manifestation that I interpret as evidence of another borrowing from Black feminist contributions to political paradigms.

The specific contributions of Black women to the Black emancipatory traditions I want to explore here can be cumulatively termed interior tropes of activism. I want to be quite clear that I am not suggesting that Black women's *only* contributions to liberation ideology involve the interior. In fact, I think it is more accurate to suggest that Black feminisms have proposed that the interior and exterior be merged in the struggle for self-decolonization and liberation, that they are mutually supportive of each other, are necessary counterparts. Neither does this merged interior and exterior landscape, dynamic and multiple in itself, foreclose a sense of the specific experience of interiority as distinct from exteriority. The result, then, is a radical and multivalent reformulation of the self, with an abundance of surfaces (as in a diamond[18]) on which acts of decolonization can occur.

Significantly, Black women activists have helped to reconceptualize liberation as a highly *personal* process.[19] Personal transformation, writers such as Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde, and Angela Davis tell us, is not only a vehicle that facilitates (mass) liberation; it is also liberation itself.[20] In the foreword to *Body & Soul: The Black Woman's Guide to Physical Health and Emotional Well-Being*, Davis and June Jordan offer a comment that highlights this view of liberation:

> We cannot conceptualize healthy bodies, psyches, and communities without addressing problems that have always been taboo. This means we must go beyond the Civil Rights framework that privileges men over women and the public sphere over the private. (xi)

It was Farah Jasmine Griffin, in her essay "Textual Healing," who reminded me of Davis's and Jordan's foreword; in fact, Griffin offers an insightful reading of this passage. "Note the movement," she writes,

> from individual bodies to psyches to communities. The imagined black woman reader posited in this foreword is one who sees herself as part of a community in struggle. Davis and Jordan encourage readers to challenge the sexism that causes them to believe that issues of emotional and physical well-being are "private" and therefore not political. According to Davis and Jordan, attention to the taboo, to the private, leads to radical redefinition of wellness and health. (523)

Griffin, along with Davis, Jordan, and others, is working to reconsider liberation as multifaceted, so as to acknowledge and engage the various levels of indi-

vidual and collective selfhood on which colonization occurs; at the same time, they are working to suggest the fusion of these locales of liberation. This multivalent liberation construct is particular to writings by contemporary Black women and is evident historically in Black women's cultural responses and living: the blues of Nina Simone, the actions of Sojourner Truth, the stories and garden of Walker's mother. In her essay, "Slave Codes and Liner Notes," Michelle Russell helps to make this point clear in relation to blues singer Simone: "In the 1960s, Nina Simone used her music to revive our roots, to internationalize the terms of our self-determination, and to develop the cultural dimension of armed struggle" (136). While Simone's songs, including "Washerwoman Blues" and "One More Sunday in Savannah," "cultivated our folk memory," they also challenged common ways of perceiving spheres of influence as binaries (private and public, individual and collective, personal and political). Like Billie Holiday singing "Strange Fruit" or Sojourner Truth baring her upper arm before the women's convention in Akron, Ohio, Simone's words refuse to privilege any one sphere or act of liberation, and instead suggest responses that are specific and multiple, particular and communal.

This view of liberation is significant because it is an alternative to constructions that dominate Black male contributions to liberation ideology. In his "Introduction" to *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. hints at some of these differences between Black masculine and Black feminine conceptions of the world. He argues that Black feminists have "never been obsessed with arriving at any singular self-image; or legislating who may or may not speak on the subject. . . . [R]ather than attempt to construct a monolith of 'the' black woman's experience, black feminists have sought to chart the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives" (8). Gates, in summarizing a point that Black women have articulated many times before, quotes Mary Helen Washington, in particular, to hone his comment; of the Black feminist literary tradition, Washington argues,

> There are no women in this tradition hibernating in dark holes contemplating their invisibility; there are no women dismembering the bodies or crushing the skulls of either women or men; and few, if any, women in the literature of black women succeed in heroic quests without the support of other women or men in their communities. Women talk to other women in this tradition. (Quoted in Gates 7)

Washington here is signifying on Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and other Black male writers who seemed primarily to be locked in battles of selfhood (narrowly equated with manhood) with white America.

These contemporary literary distinctions are readily applicable to the larger world of Black liberation and cultural production. That is, historically, Black women's experiences and liberation theories — as represented in song, oratory, text, folklore, or the covering of holes in a wall with sunflowers — have served not only to refocus the attention of liberation on the Black self (individually and communally) but also to permit and engage multiplicity in the identity formation/negotiation process. Situated at the invisibilizing intersection of race

and gender — where "all the women are white and all the Blacks are men" — Black women have formulated emancipatory trajectories that resist exclusion and monolithism (a good example being Walker's articulation of "womanism").

One impact of Black women's contribution to liberation is the reclamation of healing for the domain of revolution and decolonization.[21] Contemporary critic bell hooks provides a useful comment: "decolonization refers to breaking with the ways our reality is defined and shaped by the dominant culture and asserting our understanding of . . . reality, of our own experience. . . . Healing occurs through testimony, through gathering together everything available to you and reconciling. . . . [H]ealing takes place within us as we speak the truth of ourselves" (*Sisters* 2, 17, 19). Here hooks describes a decolonization process that legitimizes self and healing. Decolonization as healing, she suggests, directs the mediating force of truth toward overcoming the implied and imposed fragmentation of self that is concomitant with oppression. This mediation, a kind of "shifting," is often described in Black narratives as a journey. In the context of Black feminist emphases on the value of interior landscapes in revolutionary processes, then, the journey is in part a *medi(t)ation*, an interior travel.

Meditation and mediation are integral parts of the journey trope in Black narrative. In Black women activists' records of their experiences, the journey has been redefined to account for what Patricia Hill Collins calls "the interior space of activism" (*Black Feminist Thought* 142). In this redefinition, "interior" and "exterior" activism are at the same time distinct and merged spheres, like contiguous surfaces that also partially overlap, creating a third space. Again, I am not suggesting that Black women have engaged activism only on interior self-scapes. In fact, Black women from Celia, the slave who until recently was the last woman executed in Florida (1746, for helping to set the master's house on fire), to Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Fannie Lou Hamer, Angela Davis, and Maxine Waters have historically been "exterior" or public activists. The binary of private and public does not work as a description of the experiences or theoretical formualtions of Black women, whose lives are both invisible and hypervisible.[22] What I am asserting here is a claim that Davis herself makes: because of manifestations of class, gender and race, what our society knows of Black women — what has been published or documented or permitted to become "public" and part of the record of official histories — is often only a small representation of what Black women are thinking, feeling, and doing on the inside.[23] Alice Walker makes a parallel claim in her essay on her mother. Black women's emphasis, whatever the impetus, on the interior as a creative and productive space has radical implications for liberation politics, for it resists patriarchical overemphasis on the exterior and the public by complicating the spheres of influence, and it also introduces healing into the rhetoric of liberation. The Black feminist liberation ideologies that I am speaking of here construct the journey as a radical, shifting, dynamic process, one that offers many possibilites for liberation. It is not a journey with a mythic end, a singular hero, and a mass of followers. Instead, this journey conceptualizes change as always possible, always imminent, and always *changing*.

Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought,* articulates the specificity of the journey trope in Black feminine expression:

> While the theme of the journey also appears in the work of Black men, African-American women writers and musicians explore this journey toward freedom in ways that are characteristically female. Black women's journeys, though at times embracing political and social issues, basically take personal and psychological forms and rarely reflect the freedom of movement of Black men who hop "trains," "hit the road," or in other ways physically travel in order to find that elusive sphere of freedom from racial oppression. *Instead, Black women's journeys often involve "the transformation of silence into language and action."* (105, citing Audre Lorde; emphasis added)

Not to be missed in Collins's articulation is Lorde's model of transforming silence into action. Collins, Lorde, and others place considerable emphasis on the movement from silence, an experience that is especially acute among Black women, to articulation in text and action. The silence here is both literal and figurative (for example, think of Walker's mother and her garden) and always exists alongside the particularly strong voice that most Black women literally and figuratively possess in Black and non-Black communities.[24] Within this Black feminist journey construct, freedom, on one important level, is determined by the attainment and engagement of (literal and figurative) voice. Coming-to-voice is the achievement of consciousness and reveals possibilities for freedom; that is, "consciousness . . . [is] a sphere of freedom" (103) and self-knowledge is an instigator of change.[25]

In revising the journey to liberation and citing healing as an essential element of freedom from economic, social, and psychological oppression,[26] Black feminists have asserted the personal not only as political and revolutionary but also as theoretical. If healing is as much a personal concern of Black liberation as it is a collective one, then the personal is also in conversation with the theoretical (insofar as theory implies a collective quality). In effect, as Barbara Christian argues in her essay, "The Highs and Lows of Black Feminist Criticism," Eurocentric models of thought that present and validate theory as removed and depersonalized fail to capture and reflect the lives of marginalized people; theory exists in dynamic relation to individual life ways and to the languages of people on the margins.[27]

Aspects of the journey as fashioned by Black feminist cultural productions — specifically the personal self as a site of decolonizing change — form a framework of tropes of interiorization that aids one's reading of *Autobiography.* The text calls to mind bell hooks' mantra in *Sisters of the Yams*, "revolution begins in the self."[28] The collaborative presentation of Malcolm's life in *Autobiography* suggests that the personal is a political, philosophical, and revolutionary rhetoric (in the sense that rhetoric is a process of constructing meaning, identity, and context). This rhetoric destabilizes *truth* as unitary and monolithic and argues that it is only in negotiating *truths* through constant personal shifts — what Amiri Baraka described as "groping" and "stumbling" (33) — that liberation is possible. These personal changes or shifts become a central site of *Autobiography*'s effectiveness, reemphasizing the notion of personal change as a mode of revolution.[29]

The text narrates a journey through three tropes of interior activism: reclamation of the body, negotiation of fragmented reality, and silence in/as activism.

The Body as a Knowing Place

In Black feminist reclamation of the self as an epic and revolutionary landscape resides a concomitant reclamation of the body as a legitimate source of knowing. Historian and theorist Paula Giddings effectively explains the intricate damage that the Cartesian division and hierarchization of body and mind in Western ideology perpetrate and perpetuate in the lives of Black women in particular, who are marked as "body" along both race and gender lines.[30] Black feminist thought questions this presentation of body and mind as distinct and separate. Instead, Black feminists such as Audre Lorde, who envisions the erotic as psychic and political power, present body and mind as mutually informing. Patricia Williams reminds us of the political urgency of this reclamation work, for it was a body-mind dichotomy that informed theories of will and anti-will in relation to Black American slaves (219-20); that is, Blacks were viewed in white philosophical and legal discourses as without will and therefore without agency. For these reasons, refuting a dichotomous construct of body-mind is critical to enacting any liberation process.[31]

Many Black women writers construct images of bodies as sites of knowing, starting as early as the 1800s, with religious leaders such as Jarena Lee and Rebecca Cox Jackson.[32] Whole histories are written upon these bodies and must be engaged if liberation is to occur. The body, then, is a source of liberation.[33] In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* Malcolm's physical body is repeatedly presented as a site of the philosophical; his experience of transformation is in fact often written on his body, reinforcing the idea that the personal physical landscape is a site of ideology, philosophy, and hence of power. Examples include his tales of "conking" his hair; the description of the Muslim rules of eating; his ablution after his release from prison; his beard as a prominent feature of his face after his return from Mecca (a change that is noted both in his narration and in the Epilogue); and his skin color, which he only minimally engages as a text of rape and slavery (see Handler x; and Malcolm X 52-5, 193, 221). In fact, Malcolm's physical self — his height, his hair and skin color, his gait, his bodily aura — often impressed itself upon others; for example, his ability to be soft in demeanor contradicted and challenged the "popular" image of him as hard, aggressive, and unapproachable.[34]

Malcolm's personal, physical self becomes a site for political and philosophical rhetoric. At the end of the chapter titled "Homeboy" and an extensive narration of his experiences of conking, the text offers this comment:

> [W]hen I [Malcolm] say all of this I'm talking first of all about myself — because you can't show me any Negro who ever conked more faithfully than I did. I'm speaking from personal experience when I say of any black man who conks today, or any white-wigged black woman, that if they gave the

> brains in their heads just half as much attention as they do their hair, they would be a thousand times better off. (55)

Not only is hair a political site but the text claims Malcolm's *personal* experience as a political one. It presents Malcolm as unafraid to engage his own self — his body and his experiences — in this political statement. This is a quintessential characteristic of his text: it easily shifts between individual and communal, between the "personal" and the "political."

In one of the central emotional moments of the text, when Malcolm's betrayal by the Nation of Islam and specifically Elijah Muhammad is described, *Autobiography* articulates the crisis as a body-experience: "My [Malcolm's] head felt like it was bleeding inside. I felt like my brain was damaged" (303). The words and metaphor used here are very much body-centered and are eerily similar to images of wounding and other forms of bodily mutilation that Jarena Lee and Rebecca Cox Jackson describe in their works.[35] In using the physical as rhetorical construct, the text, like its Black feminist counterparts, asserts that the personal is political and also rhetorical. Furthermore, the conversion that is (re)presented in *Autobiography* occurs on psychic/spiritual/emotional, intellectual/mental, and physical levels, in an intersection of wounding and healing that is also characteristically Black feminist.

Multiple Sensibility

There is another parallel Black feminist claim at work here — the idea of Black women's multiple sensibility. "Ella Surrey"[36] in John Langston Gwaltney's *Drylongso* says, "Black women have always had to live two lives, one for them and one for ourselves" (240). This comment highlights the potential for fragmentation that Collins describes: "Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other" (*Black Feminist Thought* 94). The sense of a bifurcated (yet symbiotic) interior consciousness that addresses both internal and external "selves" is central to Black feminist thought and reality and is readily present in Gates's argument cited above about Black women's literature.[37] *Autobiography*'s use of the physical as a metaphor seems to engage this duality of consciousness, for the physical is both personal (in that there are ways in which what is experienced physically is only knowable by the self) and public (via, for example, the body as political). The ways in which Malcolm's personality often contradicted the expectations of others seem to reflect this intersection of personal and public physical selves. When change is written on the physical (on the body), the body becomes both symbolic space and material/existential space, a literal body politic. This formulation of the body reflects the negotiation of selves referenced in Collins's comment on fragmentation and self-image.

The negotiation of fragmentation, necessary in part because of the separation of interior self from exterior, is central to decolonization. In the text, Malcolm's philosophy encourages Black people to shift their gaze from an exterior

and white one to an interior Black one. The interior self of his philosophy seems to have two parts, just as it does in "Ella Surrey's" construction: an internal self (as in the individual, personal self) and an external self (as in the collective Black masses). The recognition and engagement of these divisions, which at the same time are also overlappings, result in a construction of the self that is multiple and radical, individual and collective. Consider the way that *Autobiography* speaks of the ghetto in the following passage from chapter 15:

> The American black man [sic] should be focusing his every effort toward building his *own* businesses, and decent homes for himself. As other ethnic groups have done, let black people, wherever possible, however possible, patronize their own kind, and start in those ways to *build up the black race's ability to do for itself.* That's the only way the American black man is ever going to get respect. One thing the white man never can give the black man is self-respect! The black man can never become independent and recognized as a human being who is truly equal with other human beings until he has what they have, and until he is doing for himself what others are doing for themselves.
>
> The black man in the ghettoes, for instance, has to start *self-correcting* his own *material, moral and spiritual defects and evils.* (275-6; emphasis added except in the first case)

"Self-respect" is equated here with "building [one's] own businesses and homes." The easy movement between signs of economic success (business), psychic and physical safety (homes), and psychic well-being (self-respect), as well as the use of singular nominatives (for example, "black man") to represent a larger group, reveals the fluidity of the boundaries between terms such as "personal" and "political," "private" and "public," "interior" and "exterior," and even "individual" and "collective." The expansiveness and fluidity of the self here — evident also in Malcolm's commentary on conking — reminds me of a similar expansiveness suggested in Toni Morrison's characterization of Beloved as multiple selves.

But here also lies one of the uneasy tensions of my project: the ideas here suggest a monolithic Black response (even as the language can be teased to reveal a multiplicity), which is counter to Black feminists' contributions to Black liberation ideologies. The only resolution to this tension may come later in the essay, when I consider the text's changing ideology as a "changing same," a trope that is in fact Black feminist. Nonetheless, the notion of "self first" in this passage is a tenet of masculine-centered Black nationalist ideology. Even as Malcolm broadened his philosophy to include committed white people as allies, he still maintained the need for Black people to organize (at least in the beginning) separately because it was a way to "instill within black men the racial dignity, the incentive, and the confidence that the black race needs today to get up off its knees, and to get on its feet, and get rid of its scars, and to take a stand for itself" (374). As an ideological stance, "self first" (as articulated in Black nationalisms) was crucial to decolonization politics, yet it also reveals the second tension of this passage and my critical investigation: "self first" here is

equated with "Black first," excluding gender as important to or coexistent with Black liberation, and demanding that Black women who might want to support such an ideology self-fragment. In fact, the presentation of this *male* self as fluid — its easy movement from individual to communal — is arguably a central manifestation of sexism and the patriarchical trajectory of Black nationalist politics, because the Black male self is universalized in a process that renders Black selfhood synonymous with Black manhood. The difficulty with critically reading this passage is not only a problem of Malcolm's unrevised sexism at work even as *Autobiography* is engaging ways of formulating the self that I understand to be Black feminist; it is also a result of my attempt to liberate the text. This passage, then, is a microcosm of the whole tenor of my argument, in which *Autobiography*'s maleness undercuts the radical multiplicity of the self (as a site of collective and individual change) that can be inferred from this passage and others like it via a Black feminist critical frame.

Silence as Activism

Another example of the ambiguity of boundaries of "self" is evident on Malcolm's trip to Mecca, itself an interior exploration of a Black selfscape. This journey, full of confrontations, experiences of inadequacy, and Malcolm's own ignorance (of languages and customs), is fruitful because of its personal, exploratory nature. Yet this journey is also an important marker in Malcolm's public/political life. In this way, it becomes another metaphor for the shifting rhetoric of the personal as political and philosophical.

Lorde's characterization of a progression from "silence to language and action" serves as a useful frame for the Malcolm who emerges after his journey to Mecca.[38] The trip, a signal moment of conversion or transformation, was healing, like the application of a salve to a deep and festering wound. The continuity suggested in Lorde's model of revolutionary transformation parallels Malcolm's journey, which moves him from meditation (silence) to renaming (in language) and action.

The ultimate chapter of the narrative, "1965," is lyrical, prophetic, and panoramic; it gives readers the best narrative view of Malcolm "in action" (post-Mecca). The chapter's title firmly cements Malcolm's ideology in the Black liberation movement, and the year reference identifies him with a decade of change. In this chapter, Malcolm reflects on the high esteem he once held for Elijah Muhammad and claims that it is "dangerous . . . for people to hold any human being in such esteem, especially to consider anyone some sort of 'divinely guided' and 'protected' person" (365). His soul- and self-searching in Mecca encouraged him to hold his own self in high esteem, which is parallel to the self-respect articulated in his nationalist and economic ideologies. He describes his experience of feeling "like a complete human being" in Mecca (365), suggesting a reconciliation of previous fragmentation. What *Autobiography* codifies in this chapter is an example of self-definition as described in Collins's text, calling to mind her notion that "consciousness . . . [is] a sphere of freedom" (*Black Feminist Thought* 103). In fact, Malcolm's desire for consciousness is the

point of his contention with the notion of civil rights; when he says that Black people want *human* rights (not civil rights), he is making a distinction between civil rights as legal, political, and social freedoms, and his own desire/struggle for comprehensive human liberation including but not limited to the legal and political freedoms of civil rights. Like many Black women before him, Malcolm realized that liberation would be limited unless it was achieved by, through, and in the decolonized and decolonizing self.

Yet the chapter "1965" hardly provides the "action" that my interpretation of Lorde suggests. Likewise, late in his life, Malcolm describes (and Haley confirms) criticisms that he was not doing anything. This perceived "inaction" might be best understood in the context of a comment that Malcolm makes about meditation: speaking to Haley about his prison life, Malcolm says, "In the hectic pace of the world, today, there is no time for meditation, or for deep thought. A prisoner has that time he can put to good use" (391). Malcolm's appreciation of meditation suggests a connection between the external volatility of 1965 and internal volatility. Not only is the correlation between exterior and interior radical and resonant with Black feminist political ideologies, there is a further reenvisioning of stillness here, of the quiet but moving interior also described in Black women's works. Malcolm's embrace of meditation resists the masculinist definition of liberation as *only* exterior action and validates the (interior) turmoil that came after his break from the Nation of Islam. Writer Marita Bonner provides a description of feminine stillness that is relevant to the point I am making here:

> So — being a woman — you can wait. You must sit quietly without a chip. Not sodden — and weighted as if your feet were cast in the iron of your soul. Not wasting strength in enervating gestures as if two hundred years of bonds and whips had really tricked you into nervous uncertainty. But quiet; quiet. Like Buddha — who brown like I am — sat entirely at ease, entirely sure of himself; motionless and knowing. . . . Motionless on the outside. But inside? (7)

Bonner's description, which is echoed by many Black women thinkers/writers (including Zora Neale Hurston, whose women characters are often at a very active standstill,[39] and Toni Morrison, whose evocative use of "quiet as it's kept" opens *The Bluest Eye*), also speaks to Malcolm's stillness. Motionless on the outside, but inside? *Autobiography* gives us a view of the inside, a view of the motion and action of the inside, of Malcolm doing the quiet and revolutionary work of self.[40]

Black feminisms' stress on self-definition and the negotiation of fragmented selves stresses meditative action as an integral part of the journey to liberation. Again, the interior space of self is acknowledged as having a significant role in individual and collective decolonization. While autobiography as a genre possesses an inherent meditative quality, there are other examples of this characteristic that are particular to *Autobiography*. For example, the narrative collaboration, designed to read like an unpolished and transcribed oral history, conveys a strong sense of interiority and reflection, foregrounded in the journey to Mecca, especially its unsettling aspects.

The rhetorical quality of *Autobiography* that I am highlighting here is actually two merged concepts: mediation and meditation. *Mediation* is characteristic of African-American discourse, as Gates claims in *The Signifying Monkey*. Gates asserts that communication and knowledge are the result of the interplay between figures (or constructs) of discourse (see especially 44-88), a claim that resonates with hooks's notion of the "mediation of truth" cited earlier. *Meditation* is an African-American narrative and cultural trope, as my colleague Ruth Ellen Kocher has noted.[41] While meditation commonly implies interiority, mediation suggests exteriority, but neither term is exclusively representative of a particular sphere. The meditation on figures of discourse is concomitant with mediating those figures toward relevant meaning and can occur on any of the surfaces of the self. It is in this sense that I consider *Autobiography*'s rhetoric as a mediation of the insights of meditation.

Haley describes two complaints that other Blacks had about Malcolm X: that he only talked and did not do, and that he was "himself too confused to be seriously followed any longer" (420). I think these criticisms reflect Malcolm's search for self as a search for truth. In fact, mediation of meditation is inherent in the form of *Autobiography*: it is a story constructed from memory and meant as a reflection on a past; and it is told to and recorded by a writer who also may be engaged in his own process of mediating meditation.[42]

At Malcolm's death, the doctor announces that "the man you knew as Malcolm X is now dead." What is striking about this wording is that it reflects not only the shifting nature of Malcolm's self but also how a man who was so personal still could be so symbolically distant: the man *we knew* as Malcolm X.[43] The comment might reveal that the Malcolm we know, though perhaps a rhetorical construction, is much more the Messiah-in-the-making than the Messiah-already-made (if he is any Messiah at all).[44] Theologian James Cone, in a statement about Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, argues that "it is important to emphasize that . . . Malcolm . . . [was] not a messiah. [He showed] us what ordinary people can accomplish through intelligence and sincere commitment to the cause of justice and freedom" (315). As presented in *Autobiography*, Malcolm seemed "bent on *discovering* and *expanding* himself to his fullest limits" (Demarest 187; emphasis added), stimulating us to acknowledge and engage our own ordinary power for extraordinary change. His autobiography, constructed to mirror his emergent persona, not only reveals "the intensely social character of . . . interior lives" (A. Davis, *Women* 200) but also exhibits Collins's "interior space of activism"; it performs a Black feminist weaving of the interior of selfhood, the power of self-definition, and the quest for social emancipation.

The Failure of an Autobiography?

One of the failures, then, of *Autobiography* is that it maintained sexist and patriarchical views of women in conjunction with its unconscious engagement of Black feminist emancipatory traditions. Angela Davis attempts to recontextualize how we understand Malcolm X in relation to this issue. Davis cites Patri-

cia Robinson as "contend[ing] that after Malcolm's disillusionment with the Nation of Islam, he began to turn toward and to listen to Black women in a way that had not been possible as long as he functioned under the ideological tutelage of a man [Elijah Muhammad] . . . whose political/religious vision and whose personal life were thoroughly shaped by male supremacy" ("Meditations" 36-7). Davis continues, "because Malcolm was in the process of articulating the pitfalls and limitations of nationalism, I want to suggest that implied in that critical revisiting of Black nationalist philosophy might be a similar revisiting of the male supremacist ramifications of Black nationalism" (39). The basis for Davis's plausible though generous meditation on Malcolm is his shifting and personal political ideology: "even at a mature stage of development of his philosophical position, Malcolm did not hesitate to reexamine his ideas and consider the possibility of radical shifts in that position" (40). She writes her meditation to contest the "one-dimensional iconization of Malcolm X, because the iconization tends to close out possibilities of exploring other implications of Malcolm's legacy that are not heroic, nationalist, and masculinist" (41). And yet even outside of spaces of iconization, it is starkly evident in *Autobiography* that gender is not engaged in an emancipatory way for men or women; as Collins argues, the women in the text are presented in negative and constricting/constricted ways (as Eves or Madonnas). Collins describes the women in *Autobiography* as weak, fragile, untrustworthy, sacrificing and sacrificial constructions that reflect an authorial "conflation of Blackness, masculinity, and political astuteness" ("Learning" 76). Further, if I am correct to assert that the text's ideological strategies are intimately connected to Black women's emancipatory traditions, then the textual manifestations that Collins outlines serve as an erasure of the very people who were a critical source of the narrative's power.

As noted earlier, what is further problematic about the text — and also serves to mirror its interesting "silence" about gender — is its literal erasure of Malcolm's mother from the story. Collins notes that the mother's self is subsumed by the heroic description of Malcolm's father (62). Hilton Als, in a creative and moving (though sometimes compromising) essay, explores this erasure further, giving textual life to the ghostly presence of Malcolm's Grenadian, almost-white mother. Als's essay "Philosopher or Dog" is a ponderous musing on who Mrs. Louise Little was, a woman "who exists in *The Autobiography* to give birth to Malcolm, go mad, and look nearly colorless" (90).[45] "Who is this woman?" Als asks, a question that all readers should ask.

Als suggests that Malcolm's connection to his father was enhanced not only by the presence (as absence) of his mother but by his mother's connection to her white father: "Earl and Malcolm attached themselves to Louise's male, noncolored half. Louise did not have to meet her father. Earl and Malcolm lived him by competing with his ghost at every turn" (92). This leads me to think that there may have been an issue of homosociality — as a site of male power struggle[46] — at the center of Louise's presence in both men's lives and her erasure from the narrative of Malcolm's life. In fact, the tender and dynamic relationship between Haley and Malcolm that I described earlier results in part from Malcolm's own static and limited relationship with his mother (whose memory brings the two men together) and his wife, Betty (who only has five per cent on Haley, and is also erased from the text).

Though *Autobiography* engages Black feminist strategies and situates Louise Little as a pivotal force, it also erases her; she is most present in the Epilogue written by Haley. Malcolm's half-sister Ella, equally powerful and central in his life — funding his trip to Mecca, for example — fares a little better in the text but still lacks a textual presence adequate to the role she played in his journey of self-realization. In their (mis)representations in the narrative — the shallow deification of his mother and the limiting image of Ella as a "good wife"[47] — these two dynamic women are practically erased, lumped with the sexist and static imagery of women generally in *Autobiography*.[48] I say "practically" erased not only because Louise and Ella are written (about) in the text to some degree and not simply erased wholesale but also (and more importantly) because they are present in the very philosophy of the narrative, which draws heavily on the liberation acts and theories of Black women. These two women highlight both the feminine presence that is left out of the content of the narrative and the writers' sexism that is left unrevised.

As *Autobiography* taps into the reservoir of liberation ideologies present in Black communities and Black cultural production, it (perhaps) unconsciously engages specific Black feminist contributions to such ideologies. Like the memory of Louise Little stretching food that offers Malcolm another response to seemingly impossible situations, Black women's traditions and practices as Haley and Malcolm experienced and engaged them feed *Autobiography*.

Epilogue

I have attempted here to unlock the unconscious of the text, to make evident the Black feminist textualities that undergird *Autobiography* and our reading of it. But I want to close on a more personal note. In his essay, Wideman observes, "For me writing about Malcolm is entering a space of myth and mourning" (102). In rereading this comment, I am reminded of the passion that hooks, West, Davis, and others exhibit as they write about Malcolm. I am reminded of my own passion, and of a later comment that Wideman makes: that we fashion and imagine Malcolm "in our own image" (116).[49] In my own image: for me, writing about Malcolm is also entering a space of myth. He is, for me, shimmering and brilliant, black and beautiful. He is like a river, sending silver water drops, like little bits of velvet to kiss my ankles. I love him, love all of me that he so captivates but also reveals; I too am engaged in a "you mine, you mine" reverie with Malcolm.

I also want him to be better, want for his politics better to reflect a liberation ideology that I have come to understand as healing. I will take him with me on this journey through Black feminist practices. The two of us, together, will see what it means for us to become Black men committed to feminism. Because he is mine, and I am his, and we both want to live.

This is the journey I take in reading *Autobiography*.

Notes

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1. There has been much debate over the terms "Black feminist" and "womanist." Collins's essay, "What's in a Name?" is a useful summary of the various positions, although Collins herself seems to favor "Black feminism" if her 1989 book title is any indication. Many African-American women theologians have taken up the issue (including Katie Cannon and Cheryl Gilkes). For me, the struggle is that even as I make specific and extensive reference to Alice Walker and to her definition of "womanism," I also engage Collins from her signal *Black Feminist Thought*. Even as in my daily life I may switch between the two terms *and* also use "womanism" to specify a spiritual component, I choose for sake of clarity in the essay to use "Black feminist/feminism" to speak about the specific experiences and cultural productions of Black women. When I do use the term "womanism" here, it will be meant as a particular reference to Walker's definition, in contradistinction (not contradiction) to my use of "Black feminism." For me, as for Collins and others, the heterogeneity of terms is only reflective of the dynamism of studies about Black women.

2. Key to my argument is the idea of *Autobiography* as a collaborative text. In this way, I hesitate during the essay to speak of Malcolm X, and instead mostly speak of Malcolm's and Alex (Haley)'s collaboration. Haley's life does not have the same well-documented markers of sexism, even as he is accountable, though differently than Malcolm, for the way the text (re)presents gender.

3. As Angela Davis generously claims in her essay, "Meditations on the Legacy of Malcolm X."

4. In all fairness to Malcolm's legacy, Perry's biography seems intent on every page to unearth a previously untold truth.

5. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* was a phenomenon, selling over six million US copies in its first ten years; it was also widely translated internationally. Evidence of its incredible life exists in the numerous resurgence of Malcolm X-ism, most recently in Spike Lee's film version of the text. My use of "lieu de memoire," as well as my suggestion that the text is an icon, is indebted to O'Meally and Fabre, who argue that sites of memory exist when "individual or group memory selects certain landmarks of the past — places, artworks, dates; persons, public or private, well known or obscure, real or imagined — and invests them with symbolic and political significance. . . . [A lieu] de memoire (site of memory) . . . is material, symbolic, and functional" (7). This formulation helps to describe the potency that *Autobiography* carries in African-American cultural contexts.

6. Particularly, I am referring to Andrews; Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses* and "The Face of Autobiography"; Olney; and A. Stone. I am also

thinking of Bakhtin's account of the novel as a mixed form (heteroglossia), which resonates with autobiographical form.

7. See Marcus, "The Face of Autobiography," especially 14-15.

8. See de Man, to whom Marcus's essay referred me.

9. In a biocritical essay on Haley, M. Davis also uses the description of "porch-sitters," but this time to describe Haley's affinity for Black women's culture. She writes: "As a child, Haley listened to women storytellers reminiscent of Zora Neale Hurston's porch-sitters: his maternal grandmother, his aunts, and other female relatives" (203).

10. Some central references for this idea are Canaan's poem "Girlfriends"; Walker's definition of "womanism"; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought;* hooks, *Sisters*; or Toni Morrison's *Sula*. It is the idea of being "in the company of my sisters" that I am borrowing from Boyd.

11. Walker's argument (as well as my own) is not necessarily asserting individual recognition for Black women as much as decrying the individual and collective erasure of Black women's contributions — of their brilliance — as a result of the intersection of racial and gender hierarchies. I want to be especially clear here, as there is much evidence that rightly suggests a dynamic interaction between individual and communal in Black communities, a dynamic that is not in conflict with the trajectory of Walker's argument or my own.

12. See M. Davis, especially 202-3.

13. See Johnson (especially 113) and Baye.

14. Perry's biography raises many questions about the representation of Louise Little. It would be too distracting here to engage his claims, but I will say that as much as Perry and others note that autobiography (especially this one) is an art of exaggeration, *biography* seems to be the art of revision and discovery. Both genres are differently unreliable.

15. Riggs, in *Tongues Untied*, famously proclaimed that "Black men loving Black men is the revolutionary act." I think Riggs is echoing Beam, who wrote, "Black men loving Black men is the revolutionary act of the eighties" (240).

16. Eakin also argues that Malcolm's original intent was to compose a more traditional conversion narrative of a completed self, a critical trajectory that Demarest also supports. While this argument is contested and contestable, it is not fundamental to my central arguments here.

17. Amiri Baraka writes, "Malcolm is also . . . a figure of ideological development and change" (18). Baraka goes on to describe "Malcolm's very ideological movement [as] . . . groping and seeking, [a] stumbling and continuous rising from confusion to *partial* clarity and on" (33). Furthermore, Wood, in his moving essay, writes, "Malcolm, in the end, gave us no coherent ideology, but he did leave us a site for Black political discourse" (15).

18. I am called to use this image in remembering Toni Morrison's comment to Gloria Naylor in a *Southern Review* interview: "You work with one facet of a prism, you know, just one side, or maybe this side, and it has millions of sides, and then you read a book and there is somebody who is a black woman who has this sensibility and this power and this talent and she's over here writing about that side of this huge sort of diamond thing that I see . . . all of these planes and all of these facets. But it's all one diamond, it's all one diamond. . . . This

fantastic jewel that throws back light constantly and is constantly changing" (Naylor 590).

19. I am making a distinction in using the word "personal" as opposed to "individual." In emphasizing the self, Black women thinkers have not rejected the intricate interdependency of communal and individual in Black American life; in fact, the idea of the personal embraces the communal.

20. This subtle difference is evident in Black feminist writers who emphasize healing as essential to decolonization. This emphasis on the personal, which also highlights the interior of the self as an active and liberating space, is a fundamental idea of feminism. Black feminists, responding to attacks on race, gender and class, have aimed even more radically to describe the interior as a place of serious activism. Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* is a critical text in this regard, as is Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, which aims to return the spiritual to the political (see especially the chapter, "Uses of the Erotic").

21. The earlier passage cited from *Body & Soul* makes this connection.

22. Hurtado successfully articulates how the binary of private-public used so effectively in white feminist discourses becomes irrelevant for women of Color: "Yet the public/private distinction is relevant only for the white middle and upper classes since historically the American state has intervened constantly in the private lives and domestic arrangements of the working class. Women of Color have not had the benefit of the economic conditions that underlie the public/private distinction. Instead the political consciousness of women of Color stems from an awareness that the public is *personally* political. Welfare programs and policies have discouraged family life, sterilization programs have restructured reproduction rights, government has drafted and armed disproportionate numbers of people of Color to fight its wars overseas, and locally, police forces and the criminal justice system arrest and incarcerate disproportionate numbers of people of Color. There is no such thing as a private sphere for people of Color except that which they manage to create and protect in an otherwise hostile environment" (849). See also Mohanty, who works from Hurtado's points to delineate differences between mainstream feminist ideologies and feminist politics of Third World women (see especially 8-15).

23. A. Davis describes the highly social character of interior lives (*Women* 200).

24. This seeming contradiction, a parallel to the issue of invisibility and hypervisibility, is discussed at length in hooks, *Talking*.

25. Many Black feminist writers, critics, and scholars have noted this trope of the individual and psychic self as a landscape of collective or even national change, what I am referring to as an "epic landscape." For further reading, see McDowell; Tate; hooks, *Sisters* and *Talking;* Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*; and Mohanty, Russo and Torres, especially Mohanty's introduction.

26. Not only is this intersection explored in contemporary texts such as hooks, *Sisters*; White; Walker; Anzaldua and Moraga; and Anzaldua. It is also explored via blues songs (see Russell's "Slave Codes"), slave narratives (for example, Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl*), and early speeches and manifestos by Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Anna Julia Cooper.

27. Though this argument is commonly made today, it was first and most widely used by women of color in feminist movements during the 1970s. See the essays in section 7 of Anzaldua (especially Barbara Christian's "The Race for Theory"), and Anzaldua and Moraga, especially 23. Gwaltney offers an excellent example of the way that Black Americans theorize (in) their daily living.

28. Langston Hughes's poem "Good Morning Revolution" also famously personalizes revolution as "the very best friend / I ever had."

29. West claims that Malcolm's philosophy was one of "psychic conversion that *attempted* to engage rage and self-love" (132). It is interesting to think of this conversion in a spiritual sense, much like the conversions that Rebecca Cox Jackson and Jarena Lee described in their spiritual narratives in the 1800s. Both Jackson and Lee not only experienced conversions that were liberating personally — affirming their right to preach — but also engaged those conversions rhetorically to challenge sexism in the Black religious hierarchy and racism in general. To a lesser extent, Elaw also exhibits this trope of spiritual and personal conversion as philosophical and revolutionary rhetorical imperative. hooks helps to facilitate my connection; of Malcolm's autobiography she writes, "Like nineteenth-century slave narratives, [Malcolm's] story stands as a living testimony of the movement from slavery to freedom" (*Yearning* 79). It is this sense of conversion — of the possibility of physical, political and psychic transformation — that contributes to Malcolm's contemporary appeal. Another dilemma of my attempt to link Malcolm X to Black feminist traditions is that many of these traditions were engaged temporally before his life but written about mainly after his life in the explosion of Black women's studies in the 1970s. I am trying, then, in this essay to connect Black women's political ideologies from before and after Malcolm's life to the rhetoric in *Autobiography*.

30. Also see Crenshaw. This reclamation of the body as a source of knowledge is a major part of what women of color have been working for in the past twenty years and is readily evident in contemporary fiction.

31. The work that Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, Kaja Silverman, Trinh T. Minh-ha, bell hooks, and others have done to question how well we can know the actual body (which is historically imbedded in sign systems that move it farther and farther from being readily accessible and knowable) is important here also. In the context of Black women's experiences, then, the critique of the body-mind construct combines two related insights: one, that is it important to reclaim the body as a source of knowledge perhaps on a par with the mind, and to reject that body and mind exist distinctly; two, that it is also important, especially in relation to the notion of a fused body-mind consciousness, to question how knowable (and in what ways) this fused consciousness is, which means asking if it is really "consciousness." Griffin offers a useful commentary: "healing does not pre-suppose notions of a coherent and whole subject. The body is not a 'given concrete one can call on or return to in order to recover a truer self.' . . . [H]ealing does not deny the construction of bodies, but instead suggests that they can be constructed differently, for different ends" (524). Grosz's work, particularly her notion of body volatility, is important here.

32. Lee and Jackson described incidents of psychic conversion that were events of the body as well as acts of spirit, and in this way both women were asserting that the body could know.

33. Two wonderful narrative examples of bodies as historical texts are Sethe in Morrison's *Beloved* and the title character in Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose*.

34. See the example described in the sometimes disconcerting introduction to the text by Handler. The power of Malcolm's physical self (as perceived by others) recalls the way that Sojourner Truth engaged her body as a site for liberation. Her provocative gesture of baring her upper arm during her "Ain't I a Woman" speech is an excellent example not only of the degradation that Black women's bodies endured but also of the physical body as a location of philosophical discourse (though this engagement of the body was sometimes a response to detrimental and oppressive constructions of her physicality).

35. In her narrative, Jackson dreams that she is being slaughtered, which is an allegory of her liberation efforts. She writes, "the skin and blood covered me like a veil from my head to my lap" (94). There are many other examples of mutilation in her work, and to a lesser extent in Lee's and Elaw's narratives of the same time period.

36. I put her name in quotation marks because it is a name that Gwaltney gives to her in his ethnographic work as a way to maintain a sense of confidentiality.

37. Again, hooks, *Sisters*; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; Tate; Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*; and D. White all present cogent discussions of this idea.

38. Lorde's "model" is also descriptive of Lee's and Jackson's spiritual narratives.

39. See particularly her story "Sweat."

40. Benson's excellent reading of *Autobiography* in the context of a definition of rhetoric as knowing, being, and doing supports my reading of Malcolm's perceived inaction as action in fact.

41. From personal conversation, April 1997.

42. The issues of self-definition and authorship are complicated here: the text is a palimpsest of sorts, with Haley's voices, Malcolm's voices (personal, political, contrived, authentic), and Malcolm's life all vying for space on the page within a process of memory-making. This has been the subject of much scholarship. Demarest convincingly argues that dual authorship encouraged Malcolm to be less polemical, to use the text as a statement not of a particular political self (reality) but (as much as possible) of his own self (184-6). Eakin, however, would attribute this less to co-authorship than to the "tumultuous . . . and steadily accelerated" pace of Malcolm's life between 1963 and 1965 (156). To engage Demarest's argument completely would mean exploring other texts about Malcolm's life, which I am not able to do in this essay. Nonetheless, the factors that Demarest and Eakin describe contribute to *Autobiography*'s presentation of the achievement of clarity through uncertainty. Furthermore, the issue of collaborative authorship affects how one can interpret features such as the chapter titles and the shifts in the register of the language. For two impor-

tant essays that look at Haley's role in constructing the text in relation to concepts of Black autobiography, see Rampersad and Wideman, who offers a brilliant and complete investigation of "the art of autobiography" in the dual authorial relationship. Also see A. Stone.

43. Racism, particularly in the way that it informed media representation of Black leaders, also affected the way Malcolm was perceived as a "symbol" by whites and (differently) by Blacks.

44. My use of "construction" here is in response to some critics, particularly Benson and Perry, who have asserted that there are a number of inconsistencies between *Autobiography* and other (more reliable) accounts of Malcolm's life. This, they conclude, reveals the high level of rhetorical play in *Autobiography* and is an attempt to manipulate the reader of the text. I am not attempting here to claim *Autobiography* as a "clean" representation of Malcolm's life; instead, I am interested in the rhetorical play — if that is what it is — that he and Haley chose to use. That is, if certain constructions in the narrative (which I am suggesting were accounts of real lived experiences of struggle) were really engagements of pathos, then it is still interesting to explore what it means that Malcolm and Haley chose pathos as a central mode of expression for their narrative. Furthermore, I do think that the inconsistencies might also be an attempt to mirror the reality of our lived lives, which are often riddled with contradictions and incongruities.

45. The description of Louise Little as "almost white" reaffirms Collins's comment cited earlier that the text conflates Blackness, masculinity, and political astuteness. It is also itself a commentary on the (historical) role of color as a gendered construct in Black America.

46. Though she fails to address race effectively, Sedgwick offers a wonderful explication of her notion of homosociality; see in particular her chapter on Henry James ("Beast in the Closet"). Also see Rubin and Irigaray.

47. I am grateful to Nicole Lanson, whose careful reading of these pages suggested key areas of emphasis.

48. The chapters "Detroit Red," "Minister Malcolm X," and "El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz" contain an abundance of this imagery.

49. This phrase is also the title of Wood's edited collection, where Wideman's essay is published.

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Hamlet: Like Mother, Like Son

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For if the King like not the Comedie,
Why then belike he likes it not perdie.
—*Hamlet* First Folio 3.2.269-70

metal . . . app. related in some way to μεταλλᾶυ to seek after, explore.
—*OED* 2, *M*: 667

As Great Shapesphere puns it.
—James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* 295.3-4

"Do you like me, Kate?" asks Henry V. "*Pardonnez-moi*, I cannot tell vat is 'like me'" (*Henry V* 5.2.106-7). So culminates an extensive logic of "likeness" in the *Henriad*.[1] Deflecting likeness throughout his career, because he can brook no likeness if his rule is to be absolute, Henry V finally confronts, in Kate's French body and halting English tongue, the absolute consequences of the politics as well as the logic of likeness. How can one like the king when no one is like the king? Did not the king, after all, destroy his likenesses, Falstaff and Hotspur? History will only too bitterly prove that the king has no likeness when Henry VI ascends the throne. The king, in fact, has no likeness but himself: the king is so different, and practices such difference, that no one can tell, as Falstaff already understood, what is "like [him]" (*1 Henry IV* 2.5.228).[2]

In *Hamlet* (1600-1601), which is closely related to *Henry V* (1599), the logic of likeness will play itself

out again, though this time with more thrilling as they are also more terrifying consequences. "Is it not *like* the King?" Marcellus asks Horatio when the ghost appears, and Horatio replies, "As thou art to thyself" (1.1.57-8; emphasis added). But Hamlet says, only a short while later, "A was a man, take him for all in all, / I shall not look upon his *like* again" (1.2.186-7; emphasis added). And his lament can hardly fail to trouble us the more because we have just heard him scorn "my uncle, / My father's brother, . . . no more *like* my father / Than I to Hercules" (1.2.151-3; emphasis added). Whether too much or too little, *like*(ness), from the beginning, stalks the characters' talk — and thus our response as well.[3]

These instances, with a great many others (*like* occurs over 90 times in the play), suggest the thesis and the argument that I wish to pursue in this essay — namely, that one discourse for explaining the tragedy of *Hamlet* is that of the crisis of likeness, of which the psychopathology most revulsive, as it is also most recurrent in Western culture's self-representation, is incest. I argue, in particular, that Hamlet fears most uncontrollably his likeness not with his father, nor with Claudius, nor Horatio, nor Laertes, nor Fortinbras, nor Rosencrantz, nor Guildenstern, nor the players, nor Osric, nor Polonius, nor Ophelia, nor Yorick, but rather — and it is, after this list, precisely obvious who comes next — with his mother, Gertrude.[4] Hamlet is, indeed, as others have shown, like all these other characters in the play in some particular or particulars; but it is the likeness with Gertrude that he fears the most, not only the likeness with her bespoken by his and her sexual desires but also the likeness bespoken by his and her identities. Incest is not only copulation, incest is also copying. And how if Hamlet should be a copy of Gertrude? How if he should desire his father as she did? How if he should desire Claudius, as she does? (The homoerotic pervades this world, saturated as it may be with the heteroerotic.) How if he desired King Hamlet's death (Oedipus' conundrum) as she did? How stands it then in Denmark? How stands it then with Hamlet? How, to be blunt, stands it?

I take it that at least part of Hamlet's crisis, and at least one reason for his (in)famous hesitation, is the question of succession: "A little more than kin and less than kind" (1.2.65), *and never king*. Hamlet is less than kind toward Claudius because Claudius has made him more than kin, usurping the place of his father as well as the place of his mother's husband, and thus interposed himself between Hamlet and Hamlet.[5] (I will ignore, for reasons that I think are obvious, the distinction between Old Hamlet and Hamlet — Ophelia is my witness [cf. Garber 299; Calderwood 94]: "And with a look so piteous in purport / *As if he had been loosèd out of hell* / To speak of horrors, he comes before me" [2.1.83-5; emphasis added].) As long as Claudius reigns ("He that hath killed my king and whored my mother, / Popped in between th'election and my hopes" [5.2.65-6]), Hamlet cannot succeed to his (father's) throne. The sequence *kin* > *kind* cries out the missing graph. And if Hamlet is not to be (*kin*, *kind*,) *king*, then whom is Hamlet (to) (be) like?[6]

The answer is as strange to him as it is to us, at least at first. In the political logic on which the play insists, he is like Gertrude. He is like Gertrude because, blocked from the succession, he is in the feminine position ("Must,

like a whore, unpack my heart with words / And fall a-cursing like a very drab, / A scullion" [2.2.563-5; cf. Adelman 274]). Hamlet (*t-h-*[e] *m-a-l-e*)[7] is marked feminine (cf. Leverenz; see also Parker, *Shakespeare* 263). And it is from the feminine position that he must act for almost the rest of his life. Castrated and defective (the misogynist's icon of the despised female ["frailty, thy name is woman" (1.2.146)]), Hamlet lacks the Phallus. But, more, he is the site of the lack of the Phallus (at least in the patriarchal imaginary) — madness (thy name is woman).[8] Little wonder he does not like himself, he is not like himself: "For he was *like*ly, had he been put on / To have proved most royally" (5.2.341-2; emphasis added). But what "he" would have been put on? — this he or that (s)he, that is the question.[9]

The case I am making can be illustrated in a number of places in the play, but the following cross-section of act 1 will perhaps be most helpful (emphasis added throughout).

> MARCELLUS Look where it comes again.
> BARNARDO In the same figure *like* the King that's dead.
> . . .
> BARNARDO Looks it not *like* the King? — Mark it, Horatio.
> HORATIO Most *like*. It harrows me with fear and wonder.
> (1.1.38-9, 41-2)

> MARCELLUS Is it not *like* the King?
> HORATIO As thou art to thy self. (57-8)

> HAMLET A was a man. Take him for all in all,
> I shall not look upon his *like* again.
> HORATIO My Lord, I think I saw him yesternight.
> HAMLET Saw? Who? (1.2.186-9)

> HORATIO A figure *like* your father,
> Armed at all points exactly, cap-à-pie,
> Appears
> . . .
> The apparition comes. I knew your father;
> These hands are not more *like*. (199-201, 211-12)

> HORATIO It would have much amazed you.
> HAMLET Very *like*, very *like* (234-5)

This sample may serve as a guide. It registers the insistence in the play on the almost independent agency of *like*(ness).

If we take this sample as a guide, we will find that the play charges the word *like* with a sometimes almost unbearable predictivity (and productivity):

> HORATIO If your mind *dislike* anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit. (5.2.155-6; emphasis added)

I am arguing that only when we have paused, if just a (heart)beat, over the words 'if your mind dislike," can we begin to take the measure of what follows:

> HAMLET Not a whit. We defy augury. There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? (157-61)

We hear, now, how "their re*pair* hither" will actually pair Hamlet, and s*pare* him (even a *spar*row), with the likeness in which he will leave this life, as ready as a man can be ("Since no man has aught [but also: has sought][10] of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?"), foil now (192), likeness even, to Laertes ("This *likes* me well," Hamlet says of his foil [203; emphasis added]) in that "foolery . . . such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman" (153-4), which he feels "about [his] heart — but it is no matter" (150-51), since he is now about to cross ~~the~~ woman, the *mat(t)er*, out,[11] resume his likeness, assume the Phallus, and its awful price, death:

> HAMLET Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.
> If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
> And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
> Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
> Who does it then? His madness. If't be so,
> Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged.
> His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy. (170-6)

If Hamlet now from himself is *not* taken away — if he is coincident with himself now, if he is one with himself, if his madness is gone, if he is *like* himself (in the Symbolic with the reign of the Phallus) — then, clearly, such sanity, at least here, is prologue to murder and, perhaps, worse.[12] Laertes responds: "I do receive your offered love *like* love, / And will not wrong it" (188-9; emphasis added). The depth of Laertes' hatred presumably we must measure by the likes of the fissure opened in his love by *like*(ness). The treachery of *like*(ness) perhaps nowhere in poetry receives more vivid likening; and post-modernism's agony over representation of all sorts is perhaps nowhere more tersely represented in early modern literature: love *like* love is *not* love.[13]

Like derives from a root meaning "form" or "shape" and in Anglo-Saxon means "body" (Dutch, Danish, and Swedish instances of the word mean "corpse").[14] I think it would be difficult to exaggerate how important this history is to the tragedy of Hamlet:[15] in a different body (a son's), Hamlet is nonetheless insufficiently different from his father or his mother, too *like* them (especially his mother), to enter into his patrimony or his matrimony; separation in Hamlet and for Hamlet has failed, and thus incest, the scandal of (con)fusion (failure of separation), haunts him throughout the play.[16] Thus, to take one easily overlooked example, the name *Claudius* contains the Latin root *claud-* ("shut," "close")[17] which produces *claudicare*, "to limp" (Skeat 93; Ayto 118). Oedipus, the clubfoot (who limps [Sophocles 14 and 123-4]), shadows

Hamlet (*t-h-*[e]*-l-a-m-e*) in the uncle, Claudius, who commits incest (so Hamlet calls it [1.2.157; 1.5.83]) with his mother, Gertrude. Everywhere Hamlet is surrounded with too much likeness:[18]

> KING CLAUDIUS Thy loving father, Hamlet.
> HAMLET My mother. Father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh, and so my mother. (4.3.52-4)

Madness, then (or, at least, its simulation), is his one recourse to difference. But he is precisely not mad in the closet scene with his mother (though she thinks he is), where likeness, specifically the body, overwhelms him, confuses him, and destines him to meet his double in Laertes.[19] Here, in a likeness of the Oedipal crisis, a pseudo-Oedipus, in effect, Hamlet kills the wrong father (the irony, Lacan might say, of assuming the Phallus and its simulacrum of authority) while himself playing father to his mother with his Ham(i)let(ic) lecture to her of, and from, the Symbolic: "O, throw away the worser part of it, / And live the purer with the other half!" (3.4.148-9). Father, husband, son — Hamlet is all and yet none.

The logic of likeness is fierce and intractable. To be like is to be different (enough) to mark the space across which likeness can synapse: too much difference and the space is chasmic, no communication at all obtains; too little difference and the space is chaosmic, (con)fusion threatens to overwhelm communication. Nowhere in art is this terrifying logic more palpable and threatening than in theater, for theater is the space of likeness — without likeness theater is impossible.[20]

Hence *The Mousetrap*, the postscript that is also a prescript (cf. Cavell 189-91):

> HAMLET I'll have these players
> Play something *like* the murder of my father . . . (2.2.571-2; emphasis added)
> KING CLAUDIUS What do you call the play?
> HAMLET *The Mousetrap*. Marry, how? Tropically. This play is the *image* of a murder done in Vienna. (3.2.216-18; emphasis added)

The play within the play is the incest of the play (the play playing with its own), the perverse doubling that foregrounds drama's perpetual disruption of the boundaries between self and other, male and female, inner and outer, et cetera. More than the specular *mise en abîme* of postmodernism, this moment, when the tropical is the trapical, tropes as it traps the founding anxiety of Western thought, not that all knowledge is mimetic (hence derivative, secondary, belated — Plato's grievance [cf. Parker, *Shakespeare* 180]) but that it is anamnesic, a recalling of the always-already forgotten (Plato's Socratic reverie).[21] For this is what is trapped and troped in the play within the play, where the mouse that is trapped is not Claudius, not Claudius at all (cf. Adelman 275-6; Parker, *Margins* 265), but rather her whom Hamlet calls Claudius' "mouse," his mother Gertrude (3.4.167) — that soft, round, furry thing.[22] And, just so, Hamlet

knew already but had "forgotten" that the guilty mouse was his mother: "Madam, how *like* you this play? / QUEEN GERTRUDE The lady protests too much, methinks" (3.2.209-10; emphasis added). "The Queen, the Queen's to blame" — Adelman (275) is exactly right. So what more does Hamlet need?

Of knowledge, nothing, of course. But knowledge is not enough. If knowledge were enough, who of us would not be (thin)king (cf. 2.2.244-5)? No, Hamlet needs difference (Garber 316). Which is to say, identity. He needs to I.D. the culprit else his own I.D. will never become an I.[23] And so he waits for Claudius, to con*claud* his trap. And at the moment of closure, he observes, "if the King *like* not the Comedie, / Why then *belike* he *likes* it not perdie" (3.2.269-70; emphasis added). The misprision is exact: it is not a "comedie" (rather a "tragedy" [3.2.133]), but it is (an invitation) to *come die* (I retain the first folio's spelling of *comedie*) and so the king *likes* it not ("I *like* him not, nor stands it safe with us" [3.3.1; emphasis added]). The king likes it not because it be-likes the king. Hamlet's hesitation is not a problem of knowledge, then, it is a problem of I.D.-ing, of becoming able, finally, to say, "This is I, / Hamlet the Dane!" (5.1.243-4) — which amounts to saying (let us not flinch from admitting it): "I did it, I am to blame."[24] Every child bereaved of a parent "knows," at some level, that s/he killed that parent (herein, for me, lies the genius of Cavell's reading of *The Mousetrap* [179-91]); and (dis)owning that "knowledge" (which is false but feels, all the same, very real) can be so great a burden that the child does not, cannot, survive it: "How stand I then, / That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd" (4.4.9.46-7).[25] Indeed, how does Hamlet stand?[26]

Laertes, on the other hand, I take it, has had an I.D. all along — he is Polonius' (and his [absent] mother's) son, Ophelia's brother: he is the one who *r-e-l-a-t-e-s*:

> POLONIUS This above all — to thine own self be true,
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man. (1.3.78-80)

It is his role to relate (within the Symbolic) in just that way that defines Hamlet's failure to relate:

> KING CLAUDIUS Laertes, was your father dear to you?
> Or are you *like* the painting of a sorrow,
> A face without a heart?
> LAERTES Why ask you this?
> KING CLAUDIUS Not that I think you did not love your father . . .
> (4.7.89-93; emphasis added)

Of course not; of course Laertes loved his father; there can be no question, et cetera. But that, of course, really is not the question. The question really is, how is it that Laertes *a-l-t-e-r-(e)-s* Hamlet's ego? how is it that Laertes' I.D. alters Hamlet's I? We may answer this question with Girard, with Serres, with Lacan, with Fineman, with Adelman, with Freud, with Cavell, with Parker,

with Irigaray, with Garber, with Lévi-Strauss, and perhaps with others who have addressed themselves in our recent cultural critique to the crisis of doubling. But fundamental to any answer we may offer will be the play's prior insight that the subject is not a subject except as anOther — "HAMLET I dare not confess that, lest I should compare with him in excellence. But to know a man well were to know himself" (5.2.102.30-32)[27] — even as the subject cannot speak without an (H)*oratio* ("speech") other to it:

> HAMLET O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
> Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity a while,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
> To tell my story. (286-91)

Everywhere Hamlet turns, he confronts the reality of incest, which is hardly reducible to mere copulation — incest is also copying (fusion and confusion). And to grasp the import of incest as copying in *Hamlet*, it is necessary finally to confront one of the scandals of the play, or its indulgence in puns — "We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us" (5.1.126-7).[28] A pun is incestuous, the copulation of signifiers that should remain separate, producing a word containing imperfect copies of other words (Shoaf, *Milton* 60-71). Moreover, says Dr. Johnson:

> A quibble [that is, pun] is to Shakespeare what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures, it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisition, whether he be enlarging knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing attention with incidents or enchaining it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety, and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it. (21-2)

In many respects, this is an extraordinarily important piece of criticism (and not just of Shakespeare), but for my purposes what matters most in it is the demonizing of "quibbles" that culminates in the (predictable) demonizing of the woman (Cleopatra). You just know a pun has got to be (a) female:

> HAMLET Do you think I meant country matters?
> OPHELIA I think nothing, my lord.
> HAMLET That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.
> OPHELIA What is, my lord?
> HAMLET No thing.
> OPHELIA You are merry, my lord. (3.2.105-10)

Hardly the least famous pun in English literature, "country matters" will do just nicely to make the point ("thing"): a pun like "c(o)unt(ry) mat(t)ers" is a no thing[29] (a "cunt mother" and a "mother cunt") — that is to say, irreducibly plural ("ce sexe qui n'en est pas un"), its lips are bilabial, twofold, geminated, double.[30] A pun like "c(o)unt(ry) mat(t)ers" scandalizes the Phallus, the realm of the Symbolic, which likes things hard and fast. And so Hamlet puns. This *m-e-t-a-l* (H) a-m-l-e-t, "as great Shapesphere puns it," who finds Ophelia "mettle more attractive" (3.2.99), puns remorselessly throughout the play, even unto the very end — "The rest is silence" (5.2.300) — and precisely scandalizes those who serve the Symbolic (and in turn are served by it):

> KING CLAUDIUS How fares our cousin Hamlet?
> HAMLET Excellent, i'faith, of the chameleon's dish. I eat the air, promise-crammed. You cannot feed capons so.
> KING CLAUDIUS *I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet. These words are not mine.*
> HAMLET *No, nor mine now.* [*To* POLONIUS] My lord, you played once i'th' university, you say.
> POLONIUS That I did my lord, and was accounted a good actor.
> HAMLET And what did you enact?
> POLONIUS I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i'th' Capitol. Brutus killed me.
> HAMLET It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there.
> (3.2.84-96; emphasis added)

"These words are not mine." Indeed. That is the question. Whose are the words?[31] some "c-*H-A-M-E-L*-eon's"? The words "my desire" can be uttered by any one of hundreds of millions of speakers of English. And shall I labor under the illusion that my desire is special? Why, of course I shall. So does everyone. So does Hamlet. Which, of course, is why he is (apparently) mad. To make words one's own is to appropriate them to meanings so idiotic (as well as idiolectal) as to sound mad:

> POLONIUS What is the matter, my lord?
> HAMLET Between who?
> POLONIUS I mean the matter you read, my lord. (2.2.193-5)

But then madness has a way of sounding different:

> POLONIUS Though this be madness, yet there is method in't. — Will you walk out of the air, my lord?
> HAMLET Into my grave.
> POLONIUS Indeed, that is out o'th' air. [*Aside*] How *pregnant* sometimes his replies are! A happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously *be delivered of.* (2.2.203-209; emphasis added)

Madness, punning, has a way of sounding like (a) woman: *pregnant* and *delivered of* meanings in which Reason and Sanity (the Symbolic) are not so pro(s)per-ous,[32] puns (two meanings in one sound) are the fee males must pay to speak:

> HAMLET Yet I,
> A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
> Like John-a-dreams, *unpregnant of* my cause,
> And *can say nothing* . . . (2.2.543-6; emphasis added)

Until he is pregnant, Hamlet "can say nothing." In order to speak, Hamlet must give birth:

> KING CLAUDIUS Love? His affections do not that way tend,
> Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
> Was not like madness. There's *something in his soul*
> O'er which his melancholy *sits on brood,*
> And I do doubt, *the hatch* and the disclose
> Will be some danger . . . (3.1.161-6; emphasis added)

In order to be, Hamlet must be(come) female — at the least, he must trope himself as female, and this he does by punning, for in his mad punning he participates in that two-in-one-ness that yokes madness, punning, and woman.[33] All are improper (that is, promiscuous, but also metaphoric),[34] and they prosper in pregnancy and delivery, in breeding (not to mention talkativeness). And we know what scandal attends such (s)excess: "Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" (3.1.122-3). Ophelia must be chastised, even if she should be chaste, "for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his *likeness*" (3.1.113-15; emphasis added). Ophelia must be (a) nun/none, threat to "unpregnant" Hamlet that she is — "ti opheilô; what do I owe?" as he might say.[35] After all, she is the thing of nought, O(we), that naughty thing, waiting to be filled — *O feel/fill ya*, the alpha and the omega (reversed), lacking only one vow-el, *u*.[36]

Surely, *Hamlet* rocks us so just because in its madness it teaches us what we pay for the (communal illusion of the) straight and true, the hard and fast, the pure and simple, et cetera: we pay in reality — in the loss of reality — for copies of our desire proliferating in the Symbolic. Every line you draw, every definition you make, "every breath you take, I'll be watching you." The Police, of course, are another name for the signifier, whose I, we have been told, is panoptical (Foucault 228). The more copies of ourselves we make, the more copies of our desires proliferate, the more likely our secrets are to secrete (the play oozes with secretions and secrets alike).

> HAMLET So, oft it chances in particular men
> That, for some vicious mole of nature in them — . . . (1.4.18.7-18.8)

> HAMLET Well said, old mole. Canst work i'th earth so fast?
> A worthy pioneer. (1.5.164-5)

Even before the mole begins to dig under his feet, Hamlet, such *m-e-t-a-l*, "as Great Shapesphere puns it," knows the mole has already mined his fault(-line): he "[s]hall in the general censure take corruption / From that particular fault" (1.4.18.19-18.20; cf. Adelman 267-8). The ghost is but a copy of the mole Hamlet has seen already within himself (cf. Holland 172), minor that he is. Hamlet is always already H-*o*-mlet (*m-o-l-e*), the *hommelette*,[37] or "little man" (and "broken egg")[38] — that is, the *infans* whose unorganized desire, like Claudius' "rouse" (1.4.9), threatens arousal (because unlimited, without boundary) and hence also retaliation: the mole in Hamlet is desire for his mother, and so the mole outside Hamlet is (the ghost's) desire for his mother — Hamlet is frightened finally by Hamlet because finally Hamlet also desires Hamlet.[39]

Because the ghost is but a copy of the mole Hamlet has seen already within himself, we can almost hear him say, "would it were real," or, perhaps more precise, "would it were a true copy." Still, it would be a copy only and could not set him free. Not least of the many achievements in Shakespeare studies in our time has been the demonstration of the importance of *copia* to his writing.[40] It seems obvious now that we should understand Shakespearean rhetoric explicitly in terms of copiousness. The obvious evidence of copiousness is a copy (they are the same word [Skeat 111; Cave 3-9]). If something is rotten in the state of Denmark, this is surely, as countless others before me have noted, because Elsinore is overripe ([*s*]-*i-n- o-r- e-l-s-e*), teeming with and overrun by copies — too many Hamlets in particular, for example (cf. Garber 132). The mystery of the play, which no reading will ever plumb or exhaust, seems most spectral here, where it adumbrates Shakespeare's obsession with doubles, twins, mirrors, and copies (Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*). As Shakespeare's art is unimaginable without "quibbles," so too is it unimaginable without twins: both puns and twins are two much in the same plays; and that seems to have been the way he liked it.

I don't know why. *Coincidentia oppositorum*? Paradox? Plotinus ("All knowing comes by likeness" [*Ennead* 1, Tractate 8, 66])? Increases in capital (Halpern; Kamps)? "The habit of arguing *in utramque partem*"(Altman 34)? Doubtless many answers will come from many others.[41] But if I may, I will suggest the following. The method I have used in this essay I call juxtology (Shoaf, "The Play of Puns"). I use juxtology to approach what for me is one of the most provocative issues in life and art alike and, predictably, as vexing as it is provocative — namely, coincidence.[42] I think, in particular, that it is the special effect of poetry to challenge, correct, and deepen the ordinary or accepted notion of coincidence, exposing in such a notion our efforts to "botch the words up fit to [our] own thoughts" (4.5.10), to constrain and control, by calling them coincidences, what are, in fact, complex connections of language and reality, *juxtologues* (*kin-kind* [*-king*] is a juxtologue in Hamlet's world, for example), that typically disturb, even frighten us, because they confront us with the uncanny feeling of our otherness (*déjà vous*, if you like). *Hamlet*, I believe, is *the* juxtological play in Shakespeare's writings: "O, 'tis most sweet / When in one

line two crafts directly meet" (3.4.185.8-185.9); or again, "Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service — two dishes, but to one table. That's the end" (4.3.23-5). Whatever autobiographical impulse or historical impingement may account for this distinction of the play, to it I propose we add the following, very simple complement: when the actor plays, he twins himself, assumes a juxta-pose between himself and the (other of the) character, and therein says to us: become a pun, "as you like it."[43]

Notes

1. As I have shown in "'For there.'"

I first began the current and related studies in conjunction with my work on "du*a*ls" and "du*e*ls" in Milton's poetry during a Fellowship year funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (1982-83). My work with *Hamlet*, in particular, began in the mid-eighties and shows the results of my early engagement with the writings of Lacan, whose particular essay on *Hamlet* has also played a role in the present study.

I am pleased to acknowledge the NEH again for another Fellowship, this year (1999-2000), during which I have been able to complete and revise this essay.

2. The full text of the relevant passage reads:

> FALSTAFF 'Sblood, you starveling, you elf-skin, you dried neat's tongue, you bull's pizzle, you stock-fish — O, for breath to utter what is *like* thee! — you tailor's yard, you sheath, you bowcase, you vile standing tuck —
>
> PRINCE Well, breathe a while, and then to't again, and when thou hast tired thyself in base *comparisons*, hear me speak but this.
> (2.5.226-32; emphasis added).

All citations of Shakespeare's texts in this essay are from *The Norton Shakespeare.* All quotations from the first folio are taken from *The First Folio of Shakespeare* and will henceforth be cited as F.

Spevack lists thousands of occurrences of *like* in Shakespeare. I plan to study them and to publish my findings, from time to time, in such essays as this one and the one cited above in note one.

3. Such s/talking is most terrifying, in all of Shakespeare's characters, in Iago, who, as his name says (*I ago* = "I act, perform, do, or play"), likes, or not, whomever and however it serves his plot — in I/ago we hear the d/evil of a word.

4. Like all readers of *Hamlet*, I owe a debt to Adelman; I have read her justly famous essay both in *Suffocating Mothers* and in Wofford's *Hamlet* case study. I cite the case study version since it is likelier to be more widely available (for the same reason, I cite Garber's renowned essay in the case study version, too). My chief difference from Adelman, after my focus on *like* itself, is my emphasis on Hamlet's (con)fusion with his parents; or, put it this way, for me incest is

as much trope as it is psychopathology (from this it will be seen that my path to my conclusions passes through Lacan from an origin more in Heidegger than in Freud).

I am also indebted, here and elsewhere in this essay, to Calderwood (63, in particular, in this instance), and to the splendid studies by Parker.

5. Cf. *The Norton Shakespeare*: "Hamlet hides within himself a spirit of political resistance, a subversive challenge to a corrupt, illegitimate regime shored up by lies, spies, and treachery" (1660).

6. For a different although not unrelated reading of this line, see Lupton and Reinhard, who argue, in particular — and helpfully, I think — that "as a pun about punning, about linguistic and sexual similarity and difference, the line enacts the structural incest between literal incest and incest of the letter" (3).

7. I will represent anagrams in this essay in this form: I am concerned to represent letters in all their insistence and (seeming) impertinence.

8. That is, *le Nom-du-Père* does not function in Hamlet to support the Symbolic order: see Lacan's *Écrits* 278 and 577ff.; see also Evans 119.

9. Notice now the excruciating irony of Hamlet's Hercules proportion —

Claudius		Hamlet
	≠	
Old Hamlet		Hercules

As even someone with little Latin and less Greek would know, Hercules was the victim of a *woman*, Hera, throughout his life (Gr. *Ἡρακλῆς* [*-κλέης*], f. *Ἥρα,* Hera, wife of Zeus + *κλέος* glory, renown, lit. 'having or showing the glory of Hera' — *OED* II, *sub voce*). In other words, all four men, tragically, are, contrary to Hamlet's proportion, just a*like*, showing the glory of Her(a).

10. See Stewart *passim* on perception of juncture in poetic discourse.

11. I follow Lacan to understand and represent the overturning of the generality of ~~the~~ woman in Hamlet's emerging self-consciousness: the illusion of ~~the~~ woman is gradually fading before the reality of this particular woman, Gertrude (and Ophelia must die before this will be consummated); see "God and the Jouissance of ~~The~~ Woman" and "A Love Letter."

On the importance to understanding *Hamlet* of the wordplay between Latin *mater* and English *matter* (which derives from *mater*), see Ferguson, especially 294-5; see also Parker, *Shakespeare* 254, 263.

12. F1 continues Hamlet's speech just quoted, crucially from my perspective, with

> Sir, in this Audience,
> Let my disclaiming from a purpos'd euill,
> Free me so farre in your most generous thoughts,
> That I haue shot mine Arrow o're the house,
> And hurt my *Mother*. (5.2.177-81 [in F's orthography; emphasis added])

Q1 and Q2 have "brother," which may in the end be a better reading, but I wish to observe that the textual history of the play includes, if only as an error, the

agony as well as the irony of Hamlet's renewed "sanity." See, further, *The Norton Shakespeare*, which also cites this variant (1752).

13. As others have noted, the rhetorical device most frequent in *Hamlet* that bears the burden of splitting/doubling is hendiadys; see Holland:

> one of the tragedy's two characteristic figures of speech: hendiadys, which means expressing a single idea by two nouns or adjectives parted by a conjunction: "the sensible and true avouch of mine own eyes," "the gross and scope of mine opinion . . ." (167)

The word *like* can be understood to spawn perverse hendiadys: splitting where there should be no division — "love *like* love." From this perspective, the word can also be seen as an agent of *Spaltung*, which Lacan, following but modifying Freud, reminds us, is "cette refente . . . que le sujet subit de n'être sujet qu'en tant qu'il parle" (Écrits 634), "the split which the subject undergoes by virtue of being a subject *only in so far as he speaks*" (Écrits: *A Selection* 269; emphasis added).

On the other hand is isocolon (Ferguson 293) — "balanced clauses joined by 'and'" — which is the rhetorical device favored by Claudius:

> the principle of similarity . . . governs Claudius's syntax. . . . Claudius's isocolonic style is also characteristically oxymoronic: opposites are smoothly joined by syntax and sound, as for instance in these lines from his opening speech:
>
> Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
> Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state,
> Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,
> With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
> With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
> In equal scale weighing delight and dole,
> Taken to wife . . . (1.2.8-14)

For another view of splitting, hendiadys, and doubling in *Hamlet*, see Kerrigan 79-81.

14. See Skeat, *sub voce*; also Ayto, 295. For a discussion of Shakespeare's neologism "incorpsed" (4.7.72), see Ferguson, 301ff.

15. And to the "tragedy" of *Hamlet*: the notorious difficulty of the play's genre, even its scandal, can be compassed, at least partially, just here: *Hamlet* is obviously *like* "revenge tragedy" and, just as obviously, it is not — *Hamlet*, like Hamlet, is trying to break free from its likeness to predecessors.

16. In what I consider one of his most moving meditations on the human condition, Lacan writes, in "Position de l'inconscient" (I quote at some, though not full, length from Écrits):

> *Separare,* séparer, ici se termine en *se parere,* s'engendrer soi-même . . . ce glissement du sens d'un verbe à l'autre . . . est fondé dans leur commun appariement à la fonction de la *pars.*

> La partie n'est pas le tout, comme on dit, mais d'ordinaire inconsidérément. Car il faudrait accentuer qu'elle n'a avec le tout rien à faire. Il faut en prendre son parti, elle joue sa partie toute seule. Ici, c'est de sa partition que le sujet procède à sa parturition. Et ceci n'implique pas la métaphore grotesque qu'il se mette au monde à nouveau. Ce que d'ailleurs le langage serait bien embarrassé d'exprimer d'un terme originel, au moins dans l'aire de l'indoeuropéen où tous les mots utilisés à cet emploi ont une origine juridique ou sociale. *Parere,* c'est d'abord procurer — (un enfant au mari). C'est pourquoi le sujet peut se procurer ce qui ici le concerne, un état que nous qualifierons de civil. Rien dans la vie d'aucun ne déchaine plus d'acharnement à y arriver. Pour être *pars,* il sacrifierait bien une grande part de ses intérêts. . . .
>
> Mais ce qu'il comble ainsi n'est pas la faille qu'il rencontre dans l'Autre, c'est d'abord celle de la perte constituante d'une de ses parts, et de laquelle il se trouve en deux parts constitué. Là gît la torsion par laquelle la séparation représente le retour de l'aliénation. C'est qu'il opère *avec* sa propre perte, qui le ramène à son départ. (843)

I despair of any adequate translation of this testimony. But I will say that this meditation, on the subject moving from "sa partition . . . à sa parturition," from his parting to his birth to his departing, seems to me also to express some crucial part of Shakespeare's art.

17. On "close" in the play, see Parker, *Shakespeare* 254-5, who also notes the play with "closet" (254).

18. Cf. Adelman 264-5; Calderwood 63; and Fineman 89, especially.

19. Here I acknowledge my debt to Girard and Serres, the two theorists of doubling and competition/comparison from whom I have learned the most about these issues. In particular, I wish to record my admiration for the work of Serres, especially *The Parasite*, from which I feel I have learned a great deal. I owe a debt, also, to the work of Fineman.

20. Even in the postmodern, I take it, since the premise of likeness must be present in order to be deconstructed. Cf. Calderwood 192.

21. See the *Meno*, 368-71. For an excellent meditation on memory in *Hamlet*, see Garber 328ff., especially.

22. Which was not stirring at the beginning: "BERNARDO Have you had quiet guard? / FRANCISCO Not a mouse stirring" (1.1.7-8). Here it is pertinent to note that repetition in *Hamlet* is often a smear of words, a certain stain, that spreads across the play even as rottenness spreads through Elsinore and Denmark; and *like*(ness) itself (known otherwise as the "body") is the (name of the) contagion. See also Parker, *Shakespeare*: "Words themselves are coupled in this play with a sense of pestilent breeding" (218).

23. I work (and play) from Freud's famous if cryptic utterance, "Wo Es war, soll Ich werden" (*SE* XXII, 80), where "Es" is Freud's German for "Id," the "it" of the unconscious. I greatly admire Lacan's translation, "Là où c'était, peut-on dire, là où s'était, voudrions-nous faire qu'on entendit, c'est mon devoir que je vienne à être" (Écrits 417-18), "There where it was . . . it is my duty that I should come to being" (Écrits: *A Selection* 129).

24. "To exist is to take your existence upon you, to enact it, as if the basis of human existence is theater, even melodrama. . . . Hamlet's extreme sense of theater I take as his ceaseless perception of theater, say show, as an inescapable or metaphysical mark of the human condition. . . . His bar — his lack of 'advancement' into the world — is expressed in one's sense (my sense) of him as the ghost of the play that bears his and his father's name, a sense that his refusal of participation in the world is his haunting of the world. (As if he is a figure in a play.) He overcomes his refusal only in announcing his death" (Cavell 187-8).

25. Cf. Adelman (280), who notes, as does Garber, too (134), the electrifying ambiguity in "have" — possession or action?

26. By this point, the reader will have heard the echolalia in *Hamlet* of *stand* — an essay on this word in the play could be written showing that men use it on occasions and in ways where it resonates with undertones of erotic (erectile) crisis.

27. And see also: "HAMLET For by the image of my cause I see / The portraiture of his" (5.2.75-78); or: "Horatio — or I do forget myself" (1.2.161; and see, further, Garber 311).

28. See Calderwood 80ff., 174ff., and 194; Ferguson, 292-5; and Parker, *Shakespeare* 1ff.

29. On "thing" and "thing of nought" in Shakespeare, see Willbern (and for the obscene sense, in particular, his notes 3 and 4 [260]). This essay is now reprinted in his book, *Poetic Will*, 125-42. I wish to acknowledge here an enduring debt to Burckhardt, "*King Lear*: The Quality of Nothing" in *Shakespearean Meanings* 237-59.

30. I cite, of course, Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un,* one of the most important works of French feminist critique, in part just because of the power of the p(as)un in its title.

31. About the line, "I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i'th' Capitol," *The Norton Shakespeare* informs us: "Perhaps an allusion to Shakespeare's own *Julius Caesar*; the actor who first played Polonius may also have played the part of Caesar" (1710). Here, I propose, is also the incest of drama, playing with its own: "It was a brute part [role, as well as appendage] of him, to kill so capital a calf there."

32. On the "proper" and the problematics of "property" in regard to the senses of words, see the essay by Derrida. From one perspective, this is among the oldest problems in Western philosophy. Plato is concerned with it, for example, in the *Cratylus*. Heidegger addresses it especially in the essay "Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50)." See also, for a historical overview, Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies* 36ff.

33. Here my work merges most productively with Adelman's: she shows that the play is at a very deep level about Hamlet's coming to terms with the mother, Gertrude; I show that in order to do this, Hamlet must first "become" female — give birth to, be-like, himself. Cf. Wheeler 197.

34. In the Latin rhetorical tradition, *improprie* is one word used to mean "metaphorically"; another, equally suggestive, is *abusive* (reflecting the Greek *catachresis*, "against usage") — see Shoaf, *Dante* 33-4 and notes 24-7.

35. Consider the two Greek verbs most like the name Ophelia (I transliterate to emphasize the likeness): opheilô, and ophellô, respectively, "owe, have to pay or account for," and "increase, enlarge, strengthen" (Liddell, Scott, Jones). Hamlet owes Ophelia in many senses, not least perhaps in that she (if he makes her pregnant) increases and enlarges, having first made him increase and enlarge (erection). He owes her his love, he owes her to her family, he owes her (potential) child by him to his lineage (the anxiety of the patriarchy within the Symbolic). Ophelia not only represents, she *is* obligation. But, as the other Greek word like this word suggests, she also "advance[s a thing], make[s] it thrive" — she is "useful" ("ophelimity" [OED II, *sub voce*]): I find here, in debt and use, the obscure but palpable paradox of likeness itself.

36. Lest my irony be lost in the monotone of ideologizing, let me insist that I ventriloquize — I personally do not believe Ophelia deserves chastisement, even as, I know, my commentary here perforce chastises her all over again (see, further, Dane).

37. Lacan's pun is of great importance, I think, in understanding *Hamlet* (see the next note especially). Anika Lemaire helpfully summarizes his argument from 1966, "Discussion de l'article . . .":

> The new-born child, he says, makes one think of the androgynes described by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium,* or at least the state in which they were left after the division imposed on them by Zeus.
>
> With the cutting of the umbilical cord, the new-born child, like the Androgynes, finds itself separated from a part of itself, torn from the mother's internal membranes. Birth causes it to lose its anatomical complement.
>
> The *infans*, Lacan goes on, is like a broken egg which spreads out in the form of an *hommelette* [a portmanteau word meaning both "little man" and "omelette" (trans.)]. Allusion is made here to the instinct as it can be represented in its origins.
>
> To prevent the *hommelette* invading everything and destroying everything in its path, it must be enclosed, it must be assigned limits.
>
> The libido, the instinct, will be maintained within corporeal limits and will henceforth be unable to flow completely other than by way of "erotogenic zones," which are rather like valves opening towards and by the outside.
>
> . . . [T]he delimitation of the erotogenic zone has the effect of canalizing the libido (or functional metabolism) and transforming it into a "partial instinct." The erotogenic zone is a cut or aperture inscribed in a suitable anatomical site: for example, the lips, the gap between the teeth, the edges of the anus, the tip of the penis, the vagina, the palpebral slit.
>
> Limited and canalized in this way, the libido never appears in its entirety in the subjective world and a good part of it is lost. The permanent human feeling of dissatisfaction and incompleteness is therefore to be "mythically" explained by the separation the child undergoes at birth. (127)

38. Recall Claudius on Hamlet and brooding (3.1.161-6). I think it difficult to exaggerate how important Claudius' intuition here is: he recognizes, if

only subliminally, the woman in Hamlet, the *egg-bearer*, and thus all the more pointed his earlier exclamation, "I like him not, nor *stands it* safe with us" (3.3.1; emphasis added). See, further, Fineman, "Fratricide" 101ff.

39. Hence the notorious crux, in this speech peculiar to Q2 (namely, "the dram of eale"), is amenable to a certain emendation:

> HAMLET So, oft it chances in particular men
> That, for some vicious mole of nature in them —
> . . .
> the dram of [z]eale
> Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
> To his own scandal. (1.4.18.20-2)

Using some of the Norton edition's glosses, I would paraphrase the text to say, with my emendation of "eale" to "[z]eale": "the tiny amount (eighth of an ounce) of *excess desire* ([z]eale) does make all the noble substance part of a doubt, to his own scandal."

This construction and paraphrase track and continue the logic of the earlier part of Hamlet's speech where "o'ergrowth" and "o'erleavens" suggest a failure of proportion between the "vicious mole" (a tiny blemish) and the "virtues else . . . as pure as grace" (1.4.18.17); in other words, my emendation "[z]eale" here would suggest exactly that excess (desire) only a "dram" of which, a tiny bit of which, would be enough to swell so as to overwhelm the "noble substance" to the point "of a doubt," which, in turn, would be enough for "scandal."

This, of course, is only conjecture.

40. See among others, Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies* 13ff. For me, also, of enduring importance for understanding *copia* in early modern literature is the remarkable study by Cave.

41. Here it is relevant, not to mention proper, that I acknowledge these other scholars precisely by remarking that their copiousness empowers my ability to copy from them, as I learn from them, but also that my copying from them, to develop my own theses, attests to and legitimates their copiousness. The genealogy of learning is familial — and most of its crises are like those of a (more or less dysfunctional) family (in which incest is not unheard of). Have we here, I permit myself to wonder, one reason why *Hamlet* is the site of such immense scholarly and critical activity? Here, in this play, if anywhere, sons and daughters must *separare* in order to *se parere* (and my macaronic French and English is itself evidence of the crisis). Indeed, now perhaps, just so, is the time for me to acknowledge my likeness, and unlikeness, to Shell, who writes brilliantly of likeness and the *lex talionis* in Shakespeare (117-36, in particular); but not only did I develop my ideas before reading his work (the obligatory if petulant plea of professionalism), also I differ from him in my insistence on the uncanny sign of *like*(ness), even as I depend on him to explain so well "the movement . . . from substitution and likeness to identification" (136).

42. I have entitled my next book of poems, almost complete, *Songs of Coincidence*; samples can be read on my WebPage.

43. With this conclusion, I look, obviously, to the probable chronology of

the plays: *As You Like It* precedes *Hamlet* which is followed by *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*; all three plays concern themselves both with the subjectivity of *like*(ness) and the arbitrariness of the medium that signifies the like. For helpful commentary on *As You Like It*, see Howard's headnote in *The Norton Shakespeare*, especially 1598.

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The Food of the Gods

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> Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.
>
> —Jesus in Revelation (3:20)

> We pound the grain, we bale it out.
> We sift, we tread,
> We wash it — soak, soak;
> We boil it all steamy . . .
> As soon as the smell rises
> God on high is very pleased:
> "What smell is this, so strong and good?"
>
> —"Sheng Min," *The Book of Odes* (Chou Period)

All things move or travel, rocks, atoms, stars. But everything that lives, eats. Why? Must swallowing, grotesque act, contain the dire mystery of animal existence? "No beast is a cook," Boswell remarked, but men, like beasts, may eat their kind. They are truly omnivorous, and correspondingly ambiguous in everything they achieve.

Chemists, physicists, biologists, anatomists, dietitians, chefs, your mother and mine, all have their answer. The laws of thermodynamics, of evolution, of pleasure or love, apply. The food chain rises, with photosynthesis, from the ocean floor to the sun. Food is energy. Even the gods eat to maintain their divinity. (That manna in the desert, is it their garbage?) Food is primal, like fire or light.

Food is primal, fundament-al, though poor Antonin Artaud, incandescent madman, couldn't

bear the indignity of evacuation. He was not alone. In both real and mock horror, Jonathan Swift cried in a love poem: "Celia shits." It's a law of life: what defiles goes out, not in. Anyway, lips, teeth, tongue, throat, esophagus, stomach, duodenum, ileum, cecum, colon, rectum, anus are all in place. Excrement is entropy — but not to a starving dog in Nepal or rice sprouts in a Japanese paddy. And garbage, a character in Don DeLillo's *Underworld* genially argues, incited people to build their civilizations in self-defense — not the other way around. Still, the ascent from matter to, yes, spirit, continues. Everything material rises to converge in mind.

Energy circulates. "Start with the sun," D. H. Lawrence concludes in *Apocalypse*, "and the rest will slowly, slowly happen." But why, I wonder, start with a middling, proximate star? The earth ploughs continually through the dust of the universe, and so feeds our dreams.

Food is physical but imaginary too, like lovemaking. Food is light or feces, but also sacred, spiritual like flesh, our portable temple. The chemistry, biology, gastronomy, ethic, esthetic, theology, or *génésique* — that sixth, synesthetic sense postulated by Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin — may be indistinguishable in the longest perspective, where the actual and the possible meet.

In the beginning, God served the universe to itself. Plato, in the *Timaeus*, would have us believe that the Creator — the Demiurge, he called him — concocted the cosmos in a cooking bowl. After charging the earliest gods to "beget living creatures, and give them food and make them grow, and receive them again in death," the Demiurge "once more into the cup in which he had previously mingled the soul of the universe . . . poured the remains of the elements, and mingled them in much the same manner."

Cooking as metaphor of creation, food and death from the start. But Plato does not leave it at that. He proceeds minutely to specify various "juices, concerning the affections peculiar to the tongue." He describes the diverse functions of the digestive tract. And ever the watchful puritan, he warns against "insatiable gluttony," which might make "the whole [human] race an enemy, to philosophy and culture, and rebellious against the divinest element within us." Still, "food" and "motion" remain his key metaphors for nurturing the higher aspects of the soul.

How plain, earthy, commensal, Jesus seems by comparison, when he stands at the door (in my epigraph), offering to eat with anyone hungry to hear. How modest in the spirit's fare when he teaches his disciples to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). And how scandalous (to the incredulous mind) when he reaffirms the ancient miracle of transubstantiation:

> And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed and brake it, and gave it to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.
>
> And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.
>
> And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. (Mark 14:22-4)

Everything has a history, even mystery. In 1215, Pope Innocent III decreed transubstantiation, once a Gnostic heresy, Christian doctrine. The Eucharist blurs the literal and symbolic in the act of ingesting God. Call it a banquet of immortality, at once mundane and mystical; call it divinity passing through the guts. Jesus repeats himself on the subject:

> [V]erily, I say unto you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoso eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him. (John 6:53-6)

To prepare for this celestial repast, Christians fast, give alms, prove their desert. They empty themselves of tainted victuals to receive heavenly nourishment. They deny themselves food, the staple of one life, for the promise of another and, like Muslims at Ramadan, feel hugely virtuous, if irritable. Then they break the fast. They rediscover friendship or love (*agape*) in communion, as did the disciples at the Last Supper — and doesn't this make the betrayal of Judas Iscariot all the more vile, all the more poignant?

But this communion was never innocent of violence, never impervious to horror. Aztecs "husked" the human heart, like a corncob from its sheath, in their sacrifices. St. Ignatius begged to become "the food of the beasts": "I am God's wheat," he cried, "and the teeth of the beasts shall grind me so that I will be a pure bread of Christ" (Romans 4:1). And Catherine of Siena put it even more gruesomely: "The immaculate Lamb is food, table, and servant. . . . And the table is pierced with veins, which run with blood. . . . [W]hen the [spirit] has drunk, it spits up the blood on the heads of its brothers . . . and is thus like Christ." Indeed, master spirits can thirst for blood; and all of us cook, carve, *live* on the edge of a sharpened knife.

Food, festival, spirit, violence, the sacred: they are all in deepest time and everywhere complicit. The interdictions of certain foods in Hindu, Judaic, Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic religions may have pragmatic consequences — avoiding, say, trichinosis — but their roots in older myths and rituals are undeniable. A weird power, now proscriptive, now prescriptive, sometimes menacing, more often joyous, moves through time and food.

And so, as Edouard de Pomiane reminds us, the *Galette des Rois* reverts to the Roman Saturnalia; at Easter, Russians exchange hard-boiled eggs, saying "*Kristós Voskrése*" (Christ is risen); and on Good Friday, even unbelievers in France eat *morue* (smoked cod). In Burma, Mongolia, China, Tibet, men divine by chicken bones. In the ziggurats of ancient Ur, the king's priests, "elevated cooks," prepared votive animals that the god's icons could "consume" at a glance; "at least in origin, temples are public kitchens," Michael Symons insists in *The Pudding That Took a Thousand Cooks*. And in old Athens, cockfights became part of phallic and orgiastic spectacles, featuring Dionysos in his theater, gorgeously clad.

Fertility? Since prehistoric times, sacrificial feasts insured procreation, the fertility of the vegetal, animal, and human worlds. "Because food is the human's

most fundamental resource," Peter Farb and George Armelagos argue, "offering food or abstaining from it are symbolic ways in all societies of showing devotion to supernatural powers." Do we not still fling rice like confetti at married couples as we speed them on their honeymoon? Did not the priests of Min — the god had a long, thin, elegant phallus — like Egyptian housewives today, serve lettuce to stimulate the virility of men? And in European folk customs, was not impotence traditionally cured, according to Margaret Visser, "by a hilarious, bawdy salting of the disobliging member by a crowd of women"?

Rice, lettuce, salt? Yes, and oysters, carrot tops, tiger testicles, mandrake roots . . . poppycock! And what about that original apple in Eden, which brought sexual shame in a bite? The list of aphrodisiacs, anaphrodisiacs, stimulants, soporifics, hallucinogens, foods of every kind that calm or prod, deaden or madden, the mind — that list is endless, and reaches back to the first primate, perhaps first zoon, seeking to assuage some pain with a gulp. For, as we all tacitly know, in assimilation there is also acquisition of immaterial qualities — hence cannibalism. And there lies both the creation and maintenance of a moral order.

Too abstract? Let's say we eat to become what we want, or at least to safeguard our small space in this very strange and perilous place, the universe. And so food becomes the guarantor not only of our personal affections — "Eat!" Mother cries — but also of our pieties, our cultures, our arts.

Did Rome fall with a slow, leaden crash because Claudius, Nero, Caligula, like subsequent emperors, imbibed inordinate quantities of lead from pewter plates and flasks? Never mind. It is enough to know that food drives history as symbol and as substance, as meaning and as edible matter — food is an intellectual thing.

Proust's tea cake, the famous *madeleine*, opens for him all the gates of memory and brings him to an aesthetic and spiritual apprehension, in *Remembrance of Things Past*, larger than his own, labyrinthine, endlessly resonant past. But your common cook is no stranger to succulent symbols and familiar sentiments: a burned chop can be an expression of spite. Gertrude Stein tells this anecdote about her French cook, Hélène, in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*:

> Hélène had her opinions, she did not for instance like Matisse. She said a frenchman [sic] should not stay unexpectedly to a meal particularly if he asked the servant beforehand what there was for dinner. She said foreigners had a perfect right to do these things but not a frenchman and Matisse had once done it. So when Miss Stein said to her, Monsieur Matisse is staying for dinner this evening, she would say, in that case I will not make an omelette but fry the eggs. It takes the same number of eggs and the same amount of butter but it shows less respect, and he will understand.

Food represents social status; a meal can be a metaphor for class as well as individual identity; and even fast-food places have their symbols and rituals under the sign of the Golden Arches, degraded as these may be. Dining out is

a personal manifesto as well as a culinary experience. We go to this restaurant or that, choose this table, this course, this wine instead of another, in a riot of semiotic declarations: to flaunt our wealth, power, taste, knowledge, to forge commercial or family alliances, to entertain ourselves or discharge obligations, to court, celebrate, announce. . . . The food, Symons says, is the form that our desire to share takes — hence "the key culinary virtue becomes generosity." The food, I would insist, is the equivocal impulse of human life to transcend itself, transcend its "material base" — hapless, Marxist phrase — in spiritual pleasures such as love or art, transcend itself even when other sensual pleasures root us to this world. The impulse, let us admit it, is conflictual, mixed.

The *gourmand* at a fine table, de Pomiane asserts, is in harmony with his inner and outer world. It is an insight about an idealized state, too cheerful, if not self-serving, to compel general assent. Still, food, we have seen, engages spirit at every turn, and even reconciles human beings to their mortality, as at wakes. And, of course, it engages art — as in *Finnegans Wake*?

Brillat-Savarin fancied a tenth Muse, Gastréa. He thought all the arts — and sciences too — conspired to heighten the sense of taste. Again, the great cook strains his credibility. But surely he was astute to perceive that the pleasures of the table sublimate themselves into refinements of every kind. See him take a flight of nineteenth-century gallantry:

> Nothing is more agreeable to look at than a pretty gourmande in full battle-dress: her napkin is tucked in most sensibly; one of her hands lies on the table; the other carries elegantly carved little morsels to her mouth, or perhaps a partridge wing on which she nibbles; her eyes shine, her lips are soft and moist, her conversation is pleasant, and all her gestures are full of grace; she does not hide that vein of coquetry which women show in everything they do. With so much in her favor, she is utterly irresistible, and Cato the Censor himself would be moved by her.

Roland Barthes, who was more concerned with the pleasures of the text than of the table, nonetheless wrote a long commentary on the learned and lyrical chef. Barthes argued that a "*luisance*," a nimbus or sheen, irradiates a repast, carrying its light, synesthetically, to other senses and other arts. He speculated that appetite, *gourmandise*, may derive from dream, hallucination sometimes, often from memory, giving rise to "*une imagination prédictive*." He went farther, postulating "*une sorte de mysticisme du plaisir*."

That's poststructuralist sophistication, to which I prefer to add a dash of English-language sense before chewing. In any case, I find precedents to Barthes in ancient Rome or medieval Baghdad. In the tenth century, the Caliph Mustafki expected his guests to comment on his banquets in verse. The poet Ibn al-Mu'tazz obliged, describing an *hors d'oeuvre*:

> Here capers grace a sauce vermilion
> Whose fragrant odors to the soul are blown . . .
> Here pungent garlic meets the eager sight
> And whets with savor sharp the appetite,

While olives turn to shadowed night the day,
And salted fish in slices rims the tray . . .

The point is clear, and Leon R. Kass makes it even clearer in his persuasive work, *The Hungry Soul*, which concludes: "the souls of the hungry acquire new hungers of their own, and [cry] for more than nourishment."

All that is history, you say. Can recovering the "deeper meaning of eating," as Kass believes, really "help cure our spiritual anorexia" in an age of extremity, in famine as in surfeit? I doubt the general cure but offer some instances of calmer, healing joys.

In 1987, my wife, Sally Hassan, and I visited Australia for the first time. Never mind Crocodile Dundee, we wanted to see Gay Bilson, chef and owner of the Berowra Waters Inn. If you are flush, you take an eight-seater seaplane from Rose Bay, in Sydney Harbor, and fly low over the North Shore: clear, yellow, rippling sand beaches, limpid waters shading from aqua to turquoise to ultramarine, with great swathes of gum forests in the background, dark, blue-hazed, and just menacing enough to recall the unappeasable power of the continent. The plane will land you at the restaurant dock. Otherwise, you must drive for an hour through the cluttered exurbs — garish gas stations, spangled, secondhand car dealers, an edgy four-lane highway, strung out with spiteful stop lights — till you reach Ku-ring-gai National Park. One turn, then another, and you park on a rutted road by an inlet of the Hawkesbury River. You step gingerly down some board steps and wait for the jaunty, restaurant launch to fetch you. Either way, as Gay Bilson will say, "it's a commitment." But she will always be there, at the top of the spare, modernist stairway, to greet you with a warm, shy smile. It's part of *her* commitment.

The building is a long, glass box with plain, scrubbed wood floor, wide louvers like mirror slats, square angles and clean lines everywhere, a few, fine paintings. Say, it's lunch. You sit at your table and look at the steep hill, curtained with eucalyptus, across the narrow Waters. At first, you think: this is a bit glum. Then you notice the play of shadow on the leaves, skipping sunlight on the cove, the clouds, a billowing, shifting canopy above. You notice the silence, deeper than muted talk or the soft ring of silverware. You sense the power, more absence than presence but power still, and you think: this is where gods dwell, like Ayers Rock, like Delphi or Thebes.

You sit at the table and eat. No fuss, just unblended bliss, or so it seems. Because the experience is primary, the food appears simple. Of course it is not, and yet it is. There is a timeless integrity on every plate that no art can conceal. "It's food for grownups," Gay Bilson says in a voice like rustling grain. I am no food writer, and will not sing of this braised tuna with garlic cloves and fried eggplant or that crumbed pig's ear with sautéed sweetbreads. I will only witness, avow.

Berowra Waters closed in 1995 — to the uproar in the papers, Gay Bilson responded: "It's only a restaurant, for God's sake." She moved to the Bennelong Restaurant in the Sydney Opera House. She moved on from there in 1998 to become restaurateur at large. Who is she in our spiritual and culinary scheme?

Gay Bilson: cropped blond (sometimes red-brown) hair, slate eyes, a shy smile that can turn sad, and withal a fierce intelligence, suffusing her compact frame. It is a *moral* intelligence, moral as much as epicurean. Gay Bilson: a puritan no less than an aesthete, with an unexpected taste for funk, egalitarian yet exacting to the bone. She seems to have read all the books, seen all the paintings, attended all the plays; she listens endlessly to music, which she compares — say, Giorgio Batistelli's *Experimentum Mundi* — arcanely to food. She knows everyone and inhabits a very private, proud, and vulnerable place. And she harbors a harsh, overconscientious streak. Is it guilt or anger or some secret, spiritual exigency? I know only she is a woman of character, no, a woman of both character and textured temperament — nearly a contradiction.

The *Bulletin*, an Australian weekly, listed her among "Australia's 10 Most Creative Minds." (Well, they have media hype Down Under too.) There, the architect Glenn Murcutt writes: "[Gay Bilson] has produced for Australia a cultural layer that has helped make this country a phenomenal place to be in." (Well, Australians still need to affirm their national identity.) You would expect no less from a woman who says: "If you think about food continually, you might become a great chef, possibly the very best in the world. But you might also become a great bore to people who don't speak the same food language." And you would expect no less from a woman who created a banquet around body parts, in conjunction with a major exhibition of Surrealism — a young girl emerged from a tubful of grapes and figs for dessert. This is how Bilson describes the tripes "tablecloth," over forty meters long and one meter wide:

> It was for a table which we would assemble in a room at the National Gallery in Canberra in order to serve a banquet to 80 people who had attended a Symposium on Gastronomy in 1993. More correctly, it was a tablecloth of beef stomachs which is what we bought over the three months before the dinner: whole, uncleaned stomachs, a lesson in physiology, the judge's cap of honeycomb tripes the least of the four distinct pockets. . . .
>
> This was not a cloth to be eaten off or to be eaten. It was a visual announcement of the dinner's intention (although this was withheld until the end) which was to explore the body as meat, flesh turned into food. The menu read Stomach/Egg/Flesh/Bone/Skin/Blood/Heart/Milk/Fruit. It was illustrated only with one of Fiona Hall's Morality Dolls, Gluttony.
>
> This cloth, grotesque to some, was a tablescape of great textural beauty, of varying colors from dirty white through browns to black, large and long enough to have real presence, and as undulating in its folds and pleats as our perception of a lunar landscape, heavy with craters and rolling hills. It was an idea which took such time and imaginative work to realize, was placed on the table and seen for 10 minutes, and then rolled away and placed in the gallery's waste disposal bins. . . .
>
> The tripes tablecloth was, for me at least, a troubling yet powerful metaphor for all that the meal . . . might be.

Here, it seems to me, grossest matter turns into mind even more than into sense. But I would not say the same about the tripe chapter in Rabelais's *Gar-*

gantua and Pantagruel. There, we may recall, Gargamelle, great with Gargantua, and refusing to heed the warning of her good man, Grandgousier, devours "sixteen quarters, two bushels, and six pecks" of tripe, leading the author to exclaim: "Oh, what fine faecal matter to swell up inside her!"

On an earlier occasion, in 1990, at the Fifth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy, held at St. Francis Xavier Seminary in the Adelaide foothills, Gay Bilson participated in the closing meal, a Last Supper, recreated as literally as possible by Cheong Liew and Phillip Searle. Michael Symons quoted the Russian existential theologian, Nicolas Berdyaev: "My own bread is only a material question, but my neighbor's bread is a spiritual question." And on a later occasion, Bilson's own event at the 1998 Adelaide International Arts Festival was entitled "Loaves and Fishes," "an entirely secular event which does not argue with the sacred." Again, in her words:

> It is a response to the festival's theme and in particular a response to the possibilities of the site: the water of the Torrens and the bank, a public space. The fish are to be grilled over braziers on a barge, not in pretense of fishing, but because the water will act as a gentle proscenium arch and allow a sense of separation. Only lamps will light the work. Rowers will bring baskets of fish to the shore where the bread is waiting. We will distribute the food to those who have bowls. The bowls, simple, unglazed but marked for the event, need to be purchased but the cost is a gesture, only $5 which simply covers their production cost. They belong to the eaters. *The commercial transaction has been shifted from the food.* The labor is given, and there will be music by the Adelaide Chamber singers. Call it a grace if you like.
>
> "Loaves and Fishes" has nothing and everything to do with a New Testament story.

This language may be secular, but it is hardly unspiritual, though it shades less readily into theology than into art. Chefs are cooks, yes, but also multimedia artists, and even traditional artists sometimes look to food to embody their craft. That is why, in 1994, Anya Gollacio painted the walls of the Karten Schubert Gallery in London with chocolate. That is why Bobby Baker's "Kitchen Show" was part of the Adelaide Arts Festival in 1992. That is why the works of chef, artist, and magus Phillip Searle, together with Michael Symons, Janni Kyritsis, Tim Park Poy, Alicia Rios, and many others, become as much edible as conceptual art, memorable sometimes in the social context — say, of a Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras — memorable more often as performances in a museum without walls. And indeed, that is why, in 1998, the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Sydney had a full exhibition called "Eat!", with work by Joseph Beuys, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Majima, Hany Armanious, and many Australian artists.

All right, do not call it art. Call it, as Gay Bilson does, "dalliance with imagination in that world of sensuality and intellect in which the eye, the tongue, the belly, and the brain create new 'dishes' together." Such dalliance, I add, can become like manna, feeding — in a Judeo-Christian conceit — those

who cannot live by bread alone. Not even in Australia, a robustly secular and immigrant culture, which is why I take it for example.

"Food, food, food!" latter-day saints and eternal philistines may cry, "it's just grub, isn't it? just an adjunct to survival, pleasure-coated." But in human beings, pleasure is no small matter. Plato knew this, enough to banish it almost from his Republic. And Freud knew that pleasure builds both civilization and its discontents. It claims "great Eros" as ally, though in the end, as he mooted in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* it "seems actually to serve the death instinct." Here it is again, in its darkness, this death instinct, primal homeostasis that stalks pleasure, stalks spirit throughout. Should we not, then, ask: are not pleasures of the table, like those of the bed, sometimes complicit in duskier realms? Are they wholly foreign to that melancholy land where, as Keats would have it, "aching Pleasure" turns "to Poison while the bee-mouth sips"? And if so, can pleasure also spiritualize, just as death continually spiritualizes, our brute existence?

I would not assert, as Nietzsche did — he philosophized with a hammer — that hedonism, like masochism, is a "signpost to nihilism." I have slowly come to trust my own pleasures tolerably. But I know that human beings live by contraries. We brutalize and spiritualize ourselves by terror as we do by pleasure. We defecate in fright, raise flying buttresses in holy dread. In love, we turn into Circe's swine or imagine Beatrice in Heaven. But let us give pleasure — pleasure of the table too — its due. William Wordsworth, Romantic effusions aside, did not err in his homage "to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves." Pleasure is no small matter, however frenzied (Plato, Longinus) or night-bred (Freud, Sade).

Lionel Trilling worried. He worried about the "fate of pleasure" when "the high extruded segment" of modern culture abets "an experiment in negative transcendence of the human." He worried, in short, that an "unillusioned militancy of spirit" might tip decisively the balance of our instincts in favor of destructive impulses. Would he have worried, albeit differently, at the riot of hedonism in our postmodern condition — say, an orgiastic performance by Madonna? Say, a concert of gangsta rap?

The "unillusioned militancy of spirit" in postmodern times comes from cultural terrorists and totalitarians, ideologues of every stripe. But it is not certain that postmodern literature (or art) still insists on "the energy of its desperateness," as Trilling thought in an earlier epoch; it is not certain that it still howls unconditionally for "more life" (Nietzsche). Kitsch and camp, play, parody, and self-reflexiveness — those hallmarks of postmodern culture — promise pleasures less exigent, pleasures altogether of a more frivolous kind. Certainly, they are not sublime in Kant's sense, inducing more awe than pleasure, appealing to "a higher finality."

My subject is still food, sometimes the food of the gods. And my point is that no pleasure, even that of a *soufflé Rothschild* or a Mars bar, can be wholly impervious to the underside of the human psyche. There, in that dark underside, spiritual impulses also stir. (*Pace* Rabelais.) Gay Bilson knows it: "It is

the work of cookery in the hands of the alchemical few which allows us this intimation of the sublime worth of the material, something which is so gloriously, so devastatingly dependent on destruction. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes."

Perhaps all this is gluttony garbed in metaphysics. If so, it is a metaphysics felt in the gut and shared among friends. Or call it a spiritual gluttony, with a humanist edge.

I admitted to trusting my pleasures tolerably. That is why dining out, over the years, may have cost me more dollars than accumulating a fair personal library, which overflows several rooms. That is also why I may count more friends among chefs and waiters than among intellectuals — or academics who write articles entitled "Hunger and Ideology," "Eating Out: Voluptuosity of Dessert," "A Place at the Counter: The Onus of Oneness," "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," or "Dining Out: The Hyperreality of Appetite." I would rather read a menu. In any case, great chefs are often intelligent, erudite. Look at their books, look beyond those gorgeous, succulent colored photos, meant to water the mouth. So much wit, fantasy, humor there, so much mindfulness. And the mindfulness is *generous*, though it aspires to recognition, even commercial success — it means to please and to celebrate.

Is it Saturday night? See them crowd into a bar, a bistro, an upscale restaurant, a temple of gastronomy — Charlie Trotter's, say? With shouts or whispers, they celebrate: we are here, we are alive, we are mortals. That's a sound high as prayer, deep as mourning, a small roar on the other side of ubiquitous silence. And is it not why we sometimes mutter grace at a table, in thanks as well as joy?

Forget spirit, if you must. Sitting down to a fine, ordered table is an experience in "*luxe, calme, et volupté*" (Baudelaire), the experience, in microcosm, of a harmonious universe. Or at least the illusion of that experience. Who has not felt it on *some* occasion, at a family meal or in Taillevent? Certainly, pleasures vary, and no one knows how to give them legitimacy beyond human need. (Some say therein lies the loneliness of every heart.) But all may point, beyond that famous pleasure principle, to a mystery more luminous than night.

Let us count, at least, the food of the gods, which they have stingily bestowed on mortals, among the causes of gratified desire, its lineaments sometimes as blessed as any Blake glimpsed on a human face.